

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Strong Press, Strong Democracy

REPORTERS & WARRIORS

Too Close in Afghanistan?

Tom Ricks and the philosophical embeds

TARA MCKELVEY

Too Far in Iraq?

The incredible shrinking war

JANE ARRAF

HOW JOURNALISM CAN REGAIN ITS RELEVANCE

BRENT CUNNINGHAM

FALL BOOKS: BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

MICHAEL SHAPIRO on Jim Brosnan

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EULA BISS on Chinua Achebe

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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

September/October 2009

"To assess the performance of journalism... to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."

—from the founding editorial, 1961



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EDITED BY MIKE HOYT, JOHN PALATTELLA, AND THE STAFF OF THE COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

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Opening Shot



Summer's over. Time to put down those beach books and tuck into more substantive fare. Our books issue should help ease the transition, with its selection of biography and autobiography—just the kinds of intimate personal stories that can usher you gently through the accompanying thicket of ideas and issues. The genres are instructive, too. Biography, such as Neil Sheehan's new one on Bernard Schriever and the making of the ICBM (page 55), reminds us that a deep immersion in a subject can deliver truths that no Google-driven, drive-by investigation can approach. Autobiography reminds us that personal testimony, no matter how honest and articulate, is always partial, as Eula Biss suggests in her review of Chinua Achebe's new collection of personal essays (page 60). Elsewhere in the issue, our cover package turns to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tara McKelvey worries that Thomas Ricks, one of the country's most important military writers, has become too close to the new military establishment and an advocate for its counterinsurgency strategy, while veteran correspondent Jane Arraf argues that the press's effort to report the complicated reality in Iraq as the U.S. slowly withdraws is frustrated by the military's determination to keep the story out of the news. Enjoy. **CJR**

My story In 1988, Bernard Alexandre, a priest in Vattetot-sous-Beaumont, in northern France, reads to a group of children from his memoir, *Le Horsain*, which was later made into a film.

EDITORIAL



Truth? Yes, sir!

Why we need a clearer view of both our wars

General William Tecumseh Sherman, like a number of military leaders through history, despised journalists. Tom Curley, president and CEO of The Associated Press, noted in a recent speech that a reporter once appealed to Sherman in the name of truth, but didn't get far. "We don't want the truth told about things here," Sherman replied. "That's what we don't want. Truth? No sir!" Sorry, General, but yes we do. When a democracy goes to

war, its citizens need to know how it is going and what is being done in their name. They have a right to as close an approximation of truth as journalists can deliver, given the limitations. The right to bear witness is part of what you fight for.

We have two wars on now, and not enough truth. The chief impediment is the media's own situation—the vicious advertising recession and the economic upheaval. Going to war is costly and many newsrooms can't do it anymore. *Time* magazine, for example, is the latest to shutter its office in Iraq.

But diminishing resources is not the only problem. The military has changed too. The quality of the military-journalist relationship in Iraq got better around 2006 under the command of General David Petraeus, who wanted officers talking to the press, partly as a way to explain his approach to counterinsurgency. But the window has closed.

July 2007 saw 219 embeds in Iraq; that number dropped to sixty-three in July 2008, and this year to just twelve in

the first part of the month (full July 2009 figures were not available at press time). Fewer requests have been made, certainly. But as Jane Arraf reports on page 29, the military seems to actively discourage embedding, defeating willing reporters with red tape and travel hell, all for uncertain access in the end. Meanwhile, the turnaround for basic information in Iraq has gone from less than a day to three or four days, and the general attitude is noncommunicative. Many commanders seem ill at ease trying to explain the role of the 130,000 remaining U.S. troops under Iraqi sovereignty, even as those troops take on more complex tasks associated with a new emphasis on protecting and aiding civilians.

The Pentagon keeps adding ground rules for embedding—"They multiply like hangers in a closet," says Ron Martz, president of Military Reporters & Editors, an association of military journalists. These are not much discussed with media people before they are issued, and some are problematic. Photographers are required to get signed permissions from wounded troops they may photograph. They are forbidden to photograph the faces of prisoners. Reporters cannot describe "the effectiveness of enemy techniques," like IEDs. Some commanders enforce such rules; others don't.

In the rising war, Afghanistan, where more U.S. troops are heading, military sources saw a spike in embedding around the national elections. But given newsroom resources, it's hard to imagine it will continue. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* kept a rotating team of

about seven reporters and photographers embedded with a Georgia-based National Guard Unit in Iraq. That same unit is in Afghanistan today and the *AJC* has sent no one. Along with diminished resources, some blame a diminished public interest in both of these long, grinding wars. But that's no excuse. First, if you make coverage compelling many people will read it, and may come to understand its civic necessity as well. Second, the press can help bridge a troubling divide between the civilian world and the military, which is increasingly and unfairly isolated. Finally, thousands of U.S. troops are in Iraq or Afghanistan, or going soon, at personal sacrifice and risk. We owe them their collective story.

Some of them will lose everything. Among the latest from that list: Captain Ronald G. Luce, Jr., killed by an IED in Afghanistan. He was from Fayetteville, North Carolina, and served with the Mississippi Army National Guard. He was twenty-seven. **CJR**

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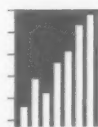


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A Fare to Remember

Your "No Free Lunch" essays in the July/August CJR were some of the best original material I have read on the growing debate over free vs. paid online news content. Every essay was fascinating and thought-provoking. I especially enjoyed Michael Shapiro's piece "Open for Business." But, again, this was a first-rate collection that I'm sure was widely read by many opinion leaders in our industry. Thanks again to all who were involved in conceiving and executing this package on a timely and important topic.

Skip Perez

Executive editor, The Ledger
Lakeland, FL

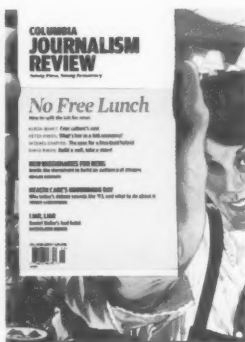
On the Wall

When David Simon argues in "Build the Wall" (CJR, July/August) that *The Baltimore Sun* should push readers online by charging more for the physical newspaper and its delivery, he either ignores or misses the financial potential of the Internet: profits from fragmentation. I can go to iTunes and buy a variety of genres of music in the smallest possible form—a song—or get a discount by buying in bulk—an album. Journalism could work in the same way. I could buy one technology article or buy the whole section for the day or the week at a discount.

People have to start paying; we both agree that needs to happen. Let's do it in a way that will make people really love and appreciate journalism again instead of bullying them into subscriptions and turning off a new generation of Americans to the pleasure of reading the *Times's* Sunday Arts section.

Aankit Patel
New York, NY

I agree with Simon that the current situation has to change, and that *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* can lead the way. And I, too, disagree with many journalism thinkers that charging subscriptions is defeatist.



Readers should be able to glimpse the garden behind the wall if outlets want to entice them to unlock the gate.

But a scheme that eliminates the link economy is a nonstarter.

If sites vanish entirely behind a paywall, readers will be shut off from discovering articles through search, sharing, e-mailing, etc. Readers should be able to glimpse the garden behind the wall if news outlets want to entice them to unlock the gate. In other words, news outlets should try to convert readers who came in for a single article into loyal repeat readers who'd pay a subscription fee. Alternately, outlets could win subscribers by giving readers a certain number of free articles before the tollgate comes down. A number of sites are discussing this plan, and there are questions about how many articles, how the messaging is handled, etc., but it would be another way to keep the benefits of the link economy without surrendering subscriptions.

Jason Fry
Brooklyn, NY

For those of us who grew up reading print editions of newspapers, the "print edition" is the best part of online newspapers. That's why newspapers should make the print edition the focal point of their sites. This may be a way for newspapers to finally make online papers profitable—charge for traditionally formatted daily editions that include features, columns, and editorials, but keep a free lightweight site available for those readers who want local and national news that's constantly getting updated (like MSNBC.com and CNN.com do). Nobody has tried this before—the closest parallel would be the Kindle editions of major newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*—but this plan would make dailies available on all computers and portable devices.

Tim McIntire
Los Angeles, CA

If news were not free, there would be enough people willing to pay for it to cover the cost of producing it. But suppose *The New York Times* suddenly started charging for online access. Although it is a great newspaper, I probably wouldn't pay for it. There are just too many free alternatives that are almost as good. Even if (for example) no other online news source were as good as the *Times*, the remaining news sources will collectively fill the gap. In economic parlance, you have goods that are near perfect substitutes. If I can't read Paul Krugman's column, I can go read some other Nobel Prize-winning economist's latest available (and accessible) column.

I believe that a number of major papers will have to collude to significantly compete in the free online news world. The news industry should take a cue from OPEC.

Russell Beckley
Ely, Nevada

Fabulous analysis. I have one suggestion. Do not underestimate the idea that

consumers will pay for quality. Bloggers don't have the resources for comprehensive research and analysis. Consider how comprehensive online coverage—with features like real-time interactivity and quality control—would transform audience interactivity from chaotic pile-ons to rewarding conversations. Such satisfying conversations, and the collateral benefit of connecting with like-minded people, would sustain a premium subscription base.

Katherine Warman Kern
Old Greenwich, CT

Show Me the Money

I had high hopes that Alissa Quart's article "Expensive Gifts?" (CJR, July/August) might mark a turning point in CJR's coverage of the media collapse, but no. Instead of trying to figure out a way to pay me for the reuse of my work, she suggests I parlay name recognition into money. Gee! I'll be sure and spend my "attribution currency" at the supermarket for "real food."

Look, I'm a freelancer. I want to get paid. In dollars. (Or Euros.) I'd prefer to be attributed as well. But given a choice, I'll take the former every time, thank you. Why is this so hard for new media pundits to understand?

Also, lost in the idea that people will somehow monetize their work by reputation, marketing, public showcases, etc., is the fact that all of that takes away time from the actual work. I already spend one-third of my time as a freelancer in what might be considered "marketing." Now I'm expected to spend even more time on non-money-making activities in the hopes of monetizing my reputation? No thanks.

Christopher Allbritton
Islamabad, Pakistan

Good Google

In "What's a Fair Share in the Age of Google?" (CJR, July/August), Peter Osnos complains that when Google directs readers interested in the Alex Rodriguez-steroid story to The Huffington Post instead of *Sports Illustrated*, which broke the story, it's unfair. But whose fault is that? Google directs traffic based purely on which site meets customer queries most effectively. SI.com should learn from the mis-

take and tailor their site accordingly. Shouting, "We're special; we should be first" demonstrates the elitist and old-fashioned view held by legacy media. Blaming Google is like blaming the newsstand vendor for placing *Sports Illustrated* on a lower shelf than a competing tabloid.

Jonathan Crossfield
Sydney, Australia

When Osnos writes that Google's "referral mechanism makes a fortune and the creators get scraps," he misunderstands the relationship between Google's revenue and the news content it links to. Google makes its money mostly from targeted advertising on product searches and other narrow, directed searches. The advertising on news-related searches is not nearly as valuable. Google could remove all newspapers and journalism content from its Web search catalog tomorrow and lose very little of its revenue. The links to news it provides are valuable to its users but not terribly valuable to its advertisers. (I just Googled "Alex

Rodriguez," and there wasn't a single ad on Google's results page.)

The trouble for news publishers lies not with Google's search advertising but with the simple fact that the display-advertising model that supported their profits on paper is not nearly as lucrative on the Web. Also, the Web itself is a giant aggregator, putting all these news publishers in direct competition with each other. Google is doing them a favor by sending them traffic. If it stopped it would be hurting them, not helping them.

Scott Rosenberg
Berkeley, CA

An Unfair Ad

An ad in the July/August CJR accuses The Associated Press of repeatedly lying in its coverage of President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and of breaching basic journalistic principles with false reports. These accusations are unfounded and a gross distortion of what actually happened.

When we investigated complaints raised by Professor Greg Grandin of New

EDITOR'S NOTE

THE SEARCH FOR A FUTURE FOR SERIOUS REPORTING IS THE JOURNALISM story of our time. We've been devoting every other magazine cover to it lately, and will return to it in a big way in November. But you don't have to wait. We have also heightened our online coverage of the future of news, and have launched a page on our Web site—called The News Frontier—to display and collect that work. The News Frontier will present original reporting on the new ways of gathering and presenting the news and new strategies to finance newsgathering. We will critique emerging editorial and financial models and discuss the questions about standards and practices that those models provoke.

The page currently features two magazine-length pieces that I heartily recommend, one by staff writer Megan Garber and one by Justin Peters, our managing editor/Web. These are the first two of a series that will run in coming weeks. The News Frontier will step back from our many assumptions about the Internet and news and look at them separately first, then together again—as a way to get down to basics about this extraordinary time of change. Garber and Peters will examine such topics as journalistic authority, community, discourse, and the purpose of news, all in an attempt to help map the new world. If you would like periodic e-mail alerts to new News Frontier content, write to gam2128@columbia.edu.

Speaking of CJR.org, we welcome two bylines to the site, as well as to the magazine masthead—Alexandra Fenwick and Greg Marx. Both graduated last year from Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, and will be with us through next June as one-year fellows. Ali and Greg will contribute to both the online and print versions of the *Columbia Journalism Review*. We believe in the strength of the print-digital hybrid, and will continue to work to be an example of that.

—Mike Hoyt

York University, one of the signers of the ad, we found that we had corrected one error shortly after it occurred and that a second example cited had merited a clarification, which we had issued at the time.

Specifically, the ad in *CJR* cited a line from a February 8, 2009, article about the arrest of suspects in the ransacking of a Caracas synagogue. In the course of lengthy remarks about the incident, the president, who is often a harsh critic of Israel, had suggested it may have been done by his political opponents in order to make him seem anti-Semitic. He warned Jews not to be taken in by this. He also accused a rabbi's guard and a police officer close to the synagogue of abetting the attack, suggesting it was an inside job.

Because Chavez had suggested the attack was an inside job and because the Jewish community in Venezuela is largely critical of Chavez, an AP reporter inferred that Chavez was saying that Jews may have been behind the attack in order to besmirch him.

While the president may have hinted it, Chavez did not use those words. The AP therefore corrected its story to state that he identified only "government opponents," not "Jews," as the possible culprits. The incorrect version was quickly superseded on all AP wires and online versions.

In the case of Chavez's discussion of FARC, the leftist guerrilla movement in neighboring Colombia, Chavez had told world leaders in January 2008 that the

guerrillas should be regarded as "true armies" with political goals deserving respect. Later, however, he said that he did not agree with their armed struggle.

A story written June 10, 2008, referred to Chavez's past words of support for the movement without noting his other comments rejecting armed struggle. The AP issued a clarification two days later to note that Chavez had rejected FARC's use of arms.

The signers of the ad call for fairness for the president of Venezuela and characterize editorial errors that have been addressed and corrected by the AP as "repeatedly lying."

We would ask that they reserve a modicum of their concern for honesty and fairness for AP's journalists, and not dream up conspiracies or other imaginary motives behind their work.

John Daniszewski

*Sr. managing editor and vice president
The Associated Press
New York, NY*

NOTES FROM OUR ONLINE READERS

IN OUR JULY 21 NEWS MEETING, WE ASKED JOURNALISTS HOW THEY WOULD remember Walter Cronkite.

As a longtime media reporter and now a professor teaching future journalists, I agree with your comments about the fears for the profession of journalism implicit in many of the tributes to Cronkite. The world has changed. But, as I tell my students, "I'm too old to be this idealistic."

In the current environment of opinion co-habiting with reporting, the goals of Cronkite and his contemporaries are more important than ever: first of all, reporting the story (an activity now under great economic pressure) and then telling it fairly and accurately—and letting the public decide. Nobody has no opinions, of course, and phony objectivity has its limits, but telling the story—and telling it straight—remains a valuable goal. —*Jane Hall*

JUSTIN PETER'S JULY 9 PROFILE OF *CHICAGO TRIBUNE* CHEESEBURGER CRITIC Kevin Pang ("Burger Meister") got some readers to bite.

"Important" reporting isn't limited to highbrow, watchdog, or marketplace news anymore. "Important" reporting now means "the stuff that keeps people buyin' the papers." Apparently, a "Cheeseburger Bureau Chief" does that. If that's pandering, it's pandering that's got the *Trib* laughing all the way to the bank. And you're reading it, sucker. —*Ima Doink*

Actually, "Ima," I'm not. I'm among the thousands that canceled my *Trib* subscription in the past year. The *Trib* has shuttered bureaus foreign and domestic. It has turned its Pulitzer-winning investigative team into a "consumer watchdog" team. The paper reads like every major decision is run by a focus group. So, am I surprised that the paper has a reporter whose job is choosing the best cheeseburgers? No. I'm more surprised that there isn't also a beer critic or one devoted to reviewing YouTube videos. —*Former Trib Guy*

Former: You must be former for a good reason—maybe more experienced than Pang, but probably expensive and set in your tired old ways. You make it sound like there's one reporter devoted to just burgers or beer or YouTube videos. Everyone in the newsroom is juggling multiple assignments and beats. It's not so much about shifting resources and priorities, but about reporters and editors doing three times as much as before, and being jacks of all trades, even if part of those responsibilities includes YouTube, burgers, or beers. —*Current Trib Guy*

I Lost a Good Reporter

I lost a good reporter today. Not a flashy reporter. Not an overpaid reporter. A good reporter.

John is the kind of scribe who got the facts, and then tried again to make sure. He made that second call. He hesitated to draw a conclusion. He rewrote leads three times or more just to get it right.

He was a small fish, really, in a big ocean. But the congressmen he covered knew him because he hounded them in the halls of Congress. The staff he covered knew them because he spoke to them regularly. But you never saw his face on TV or the Internet. There were no book deals. There was just his byline. He was what he reported, and he tried his best every single day he worked for me.

John did what he was asked to do, more so than others. But in the end there was a budget to meet and someone had to go. The shareholders do not like red ink and we, his bosses, could not find a way to keep even a good reporter.

Good-bye, John. The readers and I will miss you more than you will know.

Michael Bruno

*Deputy managing editor for defense
Aviation Week
Washington, DC*

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Currents



All Together Now (I)

Not long ago, Kevin Murphy was simply the president of the Berks County Community Foundation in Reading, Pennsylvania, a city of about 80,000 an hour northwest of Philadelphia. Like most community foundations, Murphy's manages a range of charitable funds for everything from scholarships to farmland preservation. And like most people in the philanthropy business, Murphy likes his projects to be well planned, predictable even. ¶ Then, on December 30, 2008, Myrtle Quier, whose family owns the city's 60,000-circulation daily newspaper, *The Reading Eagle*, died at age 101, and left the foundation a 27 percent stake in the Reading Eagle Company (it also owns a radio station), making the foundation not only the

only nonfamily shareholder but the largest shareholder.

Just like that, Murphy was thrust into the frantic world of media ownership, circa 2009, where things are, to put it mildly, often not well planned and extremely unpredictable. "Everyone is throwing things against the wall to see what sticks," Murphy says. "So that's what we're going to do."

In fact, Murphy and his foundation colleagues were already at work meeting the county's twenty-first-century information needs. In December 2008, they were awarded a \$255,000 grant from the Knight Foundation to create an online information hub at BC-TV, a public-access station in Reading.

The idea is to provide the citizens of Berks County with a reservoir of information about quality-of-life issues such as health care, the environment, education, the economy, public safety, etc. "In the old days," says Murphy, "communities like this were run by a group of white men from the business world and maybe academia. They made decisions for the community. That environment doesn't exist anymore. The public dialogue is much more broad-based. More people need more information and analysis that they can rely on."

The hub will be run by a managing editor (yet to be hired), who will contract with freelance writers to produce in-depth reports. The editor will also train citizen-writers in communities around the county to cover how these issues are playing out locally.

Now the challenge for Murphy and his colleagues is to figure out how to connect their information hub (scheduled to go live in December) with the *Eagle* and its Web site, and the radio station, WEEU-AM. "The idea is to create some sort of partnership among all these outlets," Murphy says. "It's going to be an evolution."

There is no template for how to do this—and no sense yet of how it will affect the *Eagle's* mission—but similar efforts to create collaborative relationships among news outlets are under way in a handful of cities, such as

'I saw Graydon [Carter] in the cafeteria! In all my years here, I've never seen him there. He was milling around uncomfortably with the commoners.'—anonymous Condé Nast source, quoted in a New York Observer story on looming cutbacks at the famously extravagant magazine publisher

Madison, Wisconsin, and San Diego (see below).

On July 21, Murphy took his team to the Newseum in Washington, D.C., to get a better sense of the history of the world they are about to join. "We were genuinely humbled and in awe of the trust that has been thrust upon us," he says. "We have come to understand, in ways we didn't before, the importance of a free press to how a community works. The stakes are very high."

—Brent Cunningham

All Together Now (II)

WHEN THE SAN DIEGO *Union-Tribune* went on sale in July 2008, veteran investigative reporter Lorie Hearn worried about the future of her I-team. Would new owners support costly and time-consuming investigations? Given the deteriorating financial situation of newspapers everywhere, could they even if they wanted to?

Rather than wait for the answer, Hearn decided to gamble on an emerging trend: she started her own nonprofit investigative institute. Inspired by other such centers in Wisconsin and Boston, Hearn's Watchdog Institute, as it is called, will likely be housed (negotiations are ongoing) at the School of Journalism & Media Studies at San Diego State University and will involve students and the broader university commu-

nity in its work. But unlike the other centers, which rely on donations and grants, Hearn went to Platinum Equity, the venture capital firm that bought the *U-T* this past March, and made a deal: Platinum will help to fund three reporters and an editor at the institute for two years. In exchange, stories that the institute works on in partnership with the newspaper will be exclusive to the *U-T*, but can be shared on an embargoed basis with other San Diego media. "They have an attitude that they're willing to take risks in order to make the newspaper an example of how to turn the business around," Hearn said.

Hearn hopes to officially launch the institute later this month, but details still must be worked out. For instance, it isn't clear exactly how the institute staff will interact with the *U-T* newsroom and the journalism school students. "I see Lorie and her staff doing some watchdog training of newsroom staff," says Karin Winner, the *U-T*'s editor-in-chief, via e-mail.

"The institute and *U-T* editors and reporters will work together on big projects just as the institute will work with other media partners."

Diane Borden of SDSU's journalism school says via e-mail that she expects many of her students, at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, will want to work with the institute, and that they are discussing the possibility of situating research projects and internships at

the institute. "We also envision that institute staff will teach courses in database journalism," she said. Winner also said that she hopes some of Borden's students will have internships at the *U-T* through this partnership. "Some may end up being entry-level journalists for us down the road," she added.

While the deal with Platinum guarantees the institute can pay salaries for two years (Hearn declined to say how much Platinum kicked in), it doesn't cover everything. "You need to find all different sorts of funding," Hearn explained. "Platinum is just one piece of this. If you have a diverse revenue strategy, this model can be fully sustainable."

Beyond the details, though, is the more important idea that undergirds all these new nonprofit centers: news outlets collaborating to ensure that high-quality investigative journalism survives. "The work that we do will transcend competition and promote collaboration," Hearn said. "The whole idea of doing investigative work that's shared with everyone is unique. ProPublica does that sort of thing on a national level, but we're focusing on a local one. It's my hope that it is embraced."

For her part, Winner is happy to embrace it. "I think it's risky, but definitely worth trying," Winner said. "We could be shaping the way this kind of work gets done by major metros in the future." —Megan McGinley

HARD NUMBERS

8,300 newsroom jobs lost in the last two years

828,000 stories estimated, per year, not to have been done as a result of these cuts

2,000 people contributing content at AOL (500 full-time writers and editors and 1,500 freelancers), more than double the number doing so a year ago, and many of them experienced print-journalism refugees

60 percent of real-estate agents (of 200 surveyed) who think newspaper advertising is useless

80 percent of surveyed realtors who still buy print ads occasionally (they say they do it more to appease the sellers they represent than because they think the ads will be effective)

43 percent of surveyed realtors who cut their newspaper ad budgets in the last twelve months (6 percent increased them)

1,500 pieces of personal information about every American that Acxiom, a data-collection company, estimates it has gleaned from magazine subscriptions, public records, bridal registries, etc.

62 percent of adult Internet users who use video-sharing sites like YouTube, up from 33 percent in 2006

89 percent of Internet users ages 18–29 who say they watch content on video-sharing sites (36 percent do so on a daily basis)

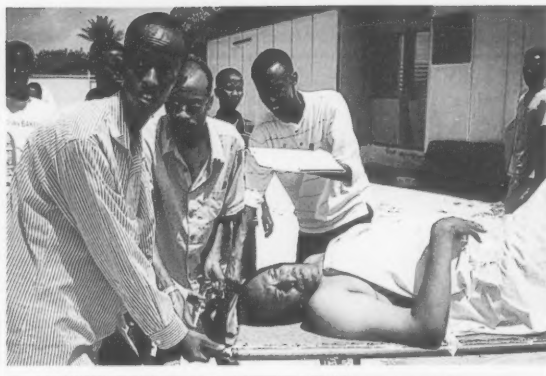
30 video obituaries *The New York Times* had completed and ready to post, as of July 31 (with ten more in production)

The New York Times, Pew Internet & American Life Project, Editor & Publisher, American Society of News Editors, Content Bridges, TechCrunch, Aim Group

Somalia's Dark Days

AHMED OMAR HASHI WAS no stranger to death threats. As a senior producer for Mogadishu's popular Shabelle Radio, Hashi routinely reported on Somalia's bloody, eighteen-year civil war, and all the bitter politics that accompany it. By 2007, he was regularly receiving threats, by phone and text message. But the Islamic insurgents from the hard-line Al-Shabab group, who were suspected in most of the threats, never made good on them. Other Somali journalists were less lucky. Around twenty have been assassinated since 2007.

In May, Al-Shabab launched a major assault on the new, moderate, Western-backed government in Mogadishu. Shabelle Radio closely covered the fighting, which is ongoing. On June 7, gunmen attacked Hashi and his boss, Moqtar Hirabe, while the two were walking in a Mogadishu market. Hirabe, a respected veteran journalist, was killed. Hashi



Close call Hashi is carried on a stretcher after being shot.

was shot in the hand and stomach, but survived.

In the aftermath of the attack, the Committee to Protect Journalists and the news Web site World Politics Review raised money to sneak Hashi to neighboring Uganda, where he is recovering from his wounds and applying for asylum in the United States. **David Axe** spoke to Hashi there by e-mail and phone.

Would you describe the attack?

Moqtar and I were walking in Bakara Market, to do some assignments. Two

masked men armed with pistols came behind us and started shooting both of us in the back. Moqtar had fallen down at the first shooting—because the bullet hit directly on his heart—but luckily I was hit, by the first shooting, on the left side of the hand, and it passed into the left side of my stomach and came out the right.

Why were you attacked?

I was attacked due to my work. They [Al-Shabab] have many times asked me to make some changes, and add pro-Al-Shabab programs, which I turned a deaf ear

to. It's against journalism laws to side with one group. Also, we have interviewed the spokesman of the Somali government's moderate Islamists, condemning the operations of Al-Shabab, and broadcast another interview with a spokesman for Ahlu Sunna [a moderate Islamic group], who told us that they had wounded the leader of Al-Shabab, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, in fighting that took place in central Somalia.

Somali media have always faced dangers. Have those dangers become greater in the last year, with the formation of the new, moderate Islamic government?

Yes. So many journalists have either been killed or forced to be in exile. So far this year, five journalists have been assassinated, and Somalia became the most dangerous place to work as a journalist in all the world.

What is the future for Somali media?

It's unpredictable, but in my opinion, the Somali media will plunge into darkness if the present attacks and repressions against journalists continue.

What are your needs now?

I'm really in need of assistance medically, financially, and for resettlement in a third country, as soon as possible. What I'm worrying about is facing hardships and security concerns that could put my life at risk if I don't find an emergency humanitarian visa. You know that I was the breadwinner for my family. I request you to do everything that you possibly can. (To support journalists in crisis, contact CPJ's journalist assistance program at www.cpj.org/journo_assist.)

LANGUAGE CORNER SHORT FUSE

Write LanguageCorner@cjr.org

A MAGAZINE WAS REVIEWING A NEW MOVIE, SAYING IT "FOCUSES ON A SMALL EXPLOSIVE Ordnance Disposal team (EOD), whose job it is to *diffuse* bombs in Iraq." Odd that the reviewer knew to use "ordnance," but didn't know to use "defuse" instead of "diffuse." Those brave people in the movie were literally taking the fuses out of bombs.

More frequently, journalists will write that a tense situation was "diffused." While it makes some sense—"diffuse" means "spread widely" or "disperse"—the word they really want is "defused."

The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage points out: "Similar pronunciation may lead to spelling confusion: The verb for removing danger is *defuse*—that is, remove a *fuse*. *Diffuse* can be an adjective meaning *spread out* or, in the case of a speech, *wordy*; it can also be a verb meaning *spread*." *Garner's Modern American Usage* explains the confusion a little better: "The notion that something *diffused* is softened like filtered light may explain why some writers misuse *diffuse* for the similar-sounding *defuse*."

Here's a memory tip: If it's violent, or potentially so—you want to take out its fuse—you want the word with the hard sound, "defuse." If you want to spread it around, you want the softer word, "diffuse."

—Merrill Perlman

LAUREL



It was the kind of ethical dilemma that classroom case studies are made of, but the potential consequences of this decision were all too real: a deranged man kidnaps

his ex-wife from a parking garage and holds her hostage in their home, prompting a massive emergency response and a neighborhood evacuation. The man demands that authorities arrange a media blackout, and when a newspaper reports the breaking story on its Web site, he issues another demand: take the story down in a matter of minutes or I'll blow this place apart. What do you do?

That was the situation in the suburbs of Hartford, Connecticut, on July 7, with Richard Shenkman, a sixty-year-old former advertising executive, as the hostage-taker, his ex-wife Nancy Tyler as the hostage, and the *Hartford Courant* on the line as the calls began to flood in just minutes before the 2:30 p.m. deadline Shenkman gave—from the police, the mayor's office, a reporter on the scene. After some hurried deliberations, the paper made its call: the story would stay.

As it turned out, Shenkman didn't have explosives in the house, and while he did have a loaded gun, he didn't use it as the deadline passed. That evening, Tyler escaped. Later, Shenkman set fire to the house and was arrested by police.

But the questions remain: Did the *Courant* do the right thing? How much should journalists worry about the potential consequences of the stories they publish? And how much weight should they give a request from authorities to pull a story when time or other constraints make it difficult to assess those consequences?

There is disagreement on all these points, but we believe that journalists do bear some responsibility for the consequences of the stories they publish. Freedom of the press comes with obligations. Adopting an absolutist perspective, in which the right to publish factual material renders other concerns immaterial, is simply a way to avoid grappling with the hard choices those obligations give rise to.

The question of how much weight to give to an official request to withhold publication is especially tricky, and the news outlets covering the hostage crisis dealt with it in different ways. Both WFSB, a local TV news outlet, and *The Day* of New London—which itself became a part of the story when Shenkman placed repeated calls to *Day* reporter Karen Florin during the standoff—were asked by police to hold their stories. Both agreed to do so temporarily—WFSB for more than four hours, *The Day*, which also received a demand directly from Shenkman in the course of his conversations with Florin, for about two. But both outlets independently decided, after the

deadline Shenkman set for the *Courant* had passed without incident, to publish what they had. *The Day* based its decision on direct knowledge of Shenkman's words and his character, gleaned from Florin's conversations with him (and her coverage of his protracted divorce case), and on its judgment of the credibility of his threats. WFSB decided that the story had become a broader public-safety issue. Neither outlet took refuge in a bright-line rule; both wrestled with the tension between public interest in the story and the fear that coverage could exacerbate the crisis or endanger lives. When they had reason to believe that the balance was in favor of publishing the story to their Web sites, they did so. For that, they deserve a **LAUREL**—with special recognition to Florin, the *Day* reporter who handled a challenging situation with grace and savvy.

Which brings us back to the *Courant*. The paper's situation was different in several key ways from WFSB and *The Day*'s. It was asked not to hold a story but to unpublish one—something no journalist is inclined to do lightly. And it was not in contact with Shenkman, so it had no quick way to independently assess what the authorities were saying.

But given what we know—which is limited, because *Courant* editors were the only actors in this drama who refused to speak to us—we believe the paper should have removed the story from its site. To a good question—For how long?—we would say: until editors had done all they could to satisfy themselves that publishing the story would not endanger lives. Professional tenets such as the one against pulling a story are important, but they are not absolute. It is possible that, as the *Courant* said in a statement the next day, “The information given to us was incomplete and the level of imminent danger unclear.” But on this point, we find Jonathan Kellogg, the executive editor of the *Waterbury Republican-American*, bluntly instructive. Thirty years ago, when Kellogg was a young reporter, he placed a call to the site of an ongoing hostage situation. He later learned that the hostage, who answered the phone and asked Kellogg not to call again, was killed by his captors. When a human life is at stake, says Kellogg, who now runs ethics seminars for journalists, everything else “is just a lot of blather.”

Given the complexity of the situation and the limits of our own knowledge, it seems inappropriate to give the *Courant* a **DART**. Still, though the paper reported on its editors' decision at the time and subsequently released a statement, it has erred by otherwise refusing to talk about that decision—to us or to anyone else. This is contrary to the ethos of transparency that all news organizations have an interest in. More important, it deprives other journalists of the opportunity to learn from the *Courant*'s experience—to become better prepared for the time when they face an ethical dilemma, on deadline, that they might never have anticipated. **CJR**

Drudge Has Lost His Touch

Technology, the competition, and the times have passed him

IF YOU VISITED THE DRUDGE REPORT ON JULY 1, YOU'D BE FORGIVEN FOR THINKING that nothing had changed. A BILLION THANKS FOR MAKING JUNE 2009—TOP JUNE IN DRUDGE REPORT'S 14 YEAR HISTORY!? PAGE HIT 675,406,735 VIEWS FROM 129,922,878 VISITS... TRAFFIC ROSE 21% FOR MONTH OVER YEAR AGO blared the headline on the right of the home page. Matt Drudge's Web site appeared to be chugging along, sinking its teeth into the news cycle just like it used to.

In the aftermath of Bush v. Kerry in 2004, Drudge's place in journalism had no parallel. Mark Halperin and John Harris, two major machers of the Washington, D.C., press corps, jointly declared: "Matt Drudge rules our world." Over the course of a decade, Drudge's no-frills approach—his original delivery method was e-mail, and some of his early content was gleaned from the trash cans at CBS News—had turned his Web site into a world-beater. In 1998, his exposure of a spiked *Newsweek* piece on Monica Lewinsky nearly knocked down the Clinton presidency, and six years later, by amplifying the claims of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, he helped torpedo John Kerry's candidacy.

Drudge was the right's one-man wrecking crew, feared by liberals and respected by bookers and editors around the country.

It's easy to look back now and laugh at the hyperbolic quality of Harris and Halperin's claim, but here's the thing: at the time, it was strikingly close to the truth.

Since then, though, a number of things have changed in ways that have diminished Drudge's power. The field of online news has welcomed several explosive upstarts, such as Politico and The Huffington Post (Talking Points Memo, which launched in 2000, has also expanded rapidly since 2004). Such sites have built on the promise of Drudge, mixing hard news and chatter into a stew that generates enormous traffic and an ability to shape the conversation. Meanwhile, the Republicans, to whom Drudge hitched his star, have fallen into disarray, and the mood of the country shifted dramatically with the election of Barack Obama and the onset of the financial crisis.

One sign that Drudge's influence is on the wane is that he goes to such great lengths to deny it. Take his July 1 boast about page views, which sounds impressive—for a moment. Page-view counts aren't taken seriously when a site automatically and completely refreshes between fifteen and twenty times an hour, as Drudge's does—a practice that artificially inflates page-view counts. Moreover, unlike unique visitors, page views are not an accurate reflection of engaged eyeballs, which is what advertisers look for above all else. In fact, if you go strictly by the numbers, Drudge is now a middle-of-the-pack niche product. As of this writing, Alexa, Amazon's Web site

counter, lists Drudge as the 704th most popular site on the Internet. (Politico is 2,078 and The Huffington Post is 331.) Compete.com, which tracks Web traffic over time, tells a fuller story: in June of 2008, all three sites had around two million unique visitors. Since then, The Huffington Post's numbers have soared, reaching 6.7 million in June. Drudge and Politico have both seen their traffic rise slightly, yet remain under the three million mark monthly.

As his competition has grown and become more dynamic, Drudge's formula has remained essentially unchanged. There are the links to stories that affirm his brand of conservatism, with its focus on the tyranny of taxation, the media's liberal bias, and the weakness of Democratic politicians, especially on matters of foreign policy. There are the links to stories that reflect his idiosyncratic tastes—JAPAN ROBOTS ON MOON BY 2020! screamed the site on April 3. The Drudge Report is stubbornly invulnerable to user participation—no one blogs, no one comments. The Huffington Post and Politico, meanwhile, host large and loyal armies of readers who interact with one another and with the site's writers. (And TPM's readers famously helped the site drive the U.S. attorneys scandal in 2007, for which TPM won a Polk Award.) In the age of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, community building is the name of the game. But not



Better days Drudge, circa 1997, when he pioneered the field of Internet gossip and could drive the news cycle.

at the Drudge Report, which remains Drudge's private kingdom.

So much so that while his erstwhile competitors still think of him as useful from time to time, they no longer regard him as a major force. When Politico first launched in early 2007, its top editors—including John Harris—made a concerted effort to get Drudge to link to their stories. Now, according to Politico insiders, those efforts to grab Drudge's attention have mostly stopped. When The Huffington Post first launched, I heard Mark Green, the former New York City public advocate and a writer for the site, describe it as an effort by the left to challenge Drudge. So I asked Nico Pitney, HuffPo's national editor, if he considered Drudge a competitor. "I don't think people at the site think that way at all," he said, noting that The Huffington Post is trying to do more original reporting, and has hired veteran report-

ers like Tom Edsall and Dan Froomkin. "That's just not Drudge's thing. We've got a dozen articles a day and he does, maybe, one article a week."

Pitney's indifference to Drudge is telling. After all, around the same time that Drudge was trumpeting rather meaningless page-view counts, Pitney was captivating the media world with his Twitter-based coverage of the unrest in Iran. Pitney's approach to that story, which depended on input from readers all over the world, is the sort of thing that Drudge's site simply lacks the capacity—and apparently the will—to do.

Obama's inauguration may have been the turning point. Not one story that originated on Drudge's site since then has had much staying power in the news cycle—and his sense for what drives that cycle seems to have failed him. Immediately following Obama's Cairo speech, for instance, Drudge focused on the

speech's length: 6,000 WORDS! read the headline. The Cairo speech was a major media event, generating an enormous amount of coverage and commentary. Drudge's complaint hardly registered. His influence was also conspicuously absent six weeks later, during the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor. On July 15, the third day of the hearings, Drudge focused on Rahm Emanuel, Nancy Pelosi, and Obama's appearance at the baseball All-Star game the night before. The Huffington Post, on the other hand, jumped on a vaguely offensive clip of Senator Tom Coburn addressing Sotomayor in the manner of *I Love Lucy's* Ricky Ricardo (Coburn seems to have assumed that Sotomayor needed to be talked to in the voice of a fellow Latin American). Within minutes, the clip was blowing up on cable news and the blogs. It was exactly the sort of contrived news

story that used to be Drudge's bread and butter. But because it relied on obsessing over and disseminating an instantly edited news clip—which isn't what Drudge does—and because it showed a Republican senator to be a buffoon, HuffPo beat him at his own game.

It could simply be that with the GOP out of power, Drudge's star has dimmed as well. But his decline feels more fundamental. Drudge is increasingly out of step with the times and the nation. Brian Williams of NBC once referred to Drudge's site as "America's bulletin board," but these days Drudge seems an unlikely host. An academic study, released in July by Kalev Leetaru of the University of Illinois, found that Drudge's site was less active than normal during the crucial early months of the Iraq war. That was a different time and different set of issues, but it suggests an interesting parallel to the Drudge Report's current fecklessness. Drudge's influence, and his role in the media landscape, seems to shrink when the stakes are high and the stories complex.

past June, Drudge worked himself into a lather when ABC News nestled inside the Obama White House to shoot an evening special. In Drudge's world, the special was another example of the too-close-for-comfort relationship between the White House and the press tasked with covering it. While it is an issue worth raising, the ABC special barely registered on the national radar. When it aired, it was the lowest-rated network program of the night. Drudge had directed his ire against a target no one much cared about.

To the extent there has been a meaningful critique of Obama from the right, it has come from a smattering of other Web sites, like Instapundit and Michelle Malkin, as well as from Rush Limbaugh. Significantly, all three engage with their audience in some way. Drudge's doesn't reply to e-mail. There is a blank space on his Web site, through which you can submit news tips. (I've tried to get in touch with him this way, to no avail.)

Meanwhile, a new right, nascent and based online, has begun to emerge. Pa-

the protestors' loyal cheerleader, turning their every move into a headline on his site. But being a cheerleader means being on the sidelines—precisely where Drudge now finds himself.

"Drudge gets so worked up every day about such petty stuff," one New York newspaper editor told me. "That's appropriate for carnival/campaign season, but it doesn't as effectively fit the mood in a country that is serious about sober governing." A nation beset by financial crisis at home and besieged around the world, in other words, has more on its mind than the length of a presidential speech or an unwatched ABC special, let alone the threat of Japanese robots. Yet it's worth noting that this editor declined to put his comments on the record. Mark Halperin and John Harris, once among Drudge's most prominent validators, also chose not to comment for this piece. The implication is clear: down the road, Matt Drudge could re-emerge. "He's on a bit of a sabbatical," explained a friend of Drudge's. "He doesn't care" that his influence isn't what it used to be.

Perhaps. But the short- or long-term prospects of the Drudge Report recapturing its place at the center of our political media are bleak. Even if Drudge were to hire a blogger, open a comments section, and adopt a more substantive approach to news, it's unlikely that he'd ever match his previous level of influence. Drudge is in part a victim of his own success. He spawned imitators and emulators, who in turn have only further splintered the media world. If there is an agenda to be set, no one outlet or editor has the power to set it. It's simply too rapid and unknowable a thing to harness. While *The Fix*, put together by Chris Cillizza of *The Washington Post*, and *Playbook*, put together by Politico's Mike Allen, are often referred to as Drudge's heirs, neither has the influence that Drudge once had, nor do they display the kind of naked ideological bias that was Drudge's hallmark. Of course, their existence is a testament to Drudge's legacy as a trailblazer in the field of Internet newsgathering and gossip mongering. But increasingly, a legacy is all the Drudge Report has to offer. **CJR**

Even if Drudge hired a blogger, opened a comments section, and adopted a more substantive approach, it's unlikely that he'd ever match his previous level of influence.

Drudge has never run a tabloid; his goal isn't to be an alluring distraction (think Gawker). Rather, he purposely takes an unserious attitude toward politics. But at the moment, politics is very serious and the consequences dire.

It would probably be too much to expect Drudge to grapple seriously with the ways in which George W. Bush's administration damaged conservatism, but even the civil war that has engulfed the GOP since Bush left office has, for the most part, been ignored by Drudge. Instead, he rehearses old conservative arguments, as if the Bush presidency had never happened. Take his undying complaints about "liberal media bias." This

jamás Media has launched an ambitious television project, predicated on the kind of technological advancements that Drudge has shunned. And the struggle over the future of American conservatism is playing out on sites like David Frum's *New Majority*. Even *National Review*, an outpost for traditional conservatives, recently hired the iconoclastic Reihan Salam in an effort to adapt. Thus far, the relationship between this new right and Drudge might best be understood as one of missed opportunity. The "Tea Party" protests that broke out in April took aim at two of Drudge's favorite targets: the Obama administration and the ballooning federal deficit. Granted, Drudge was

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Great Expectations

An Investigative News Network is born. Now what?

CALL IT THE POCANTICO DECLARATION. BACK ON JULY 1, THE LEADERS OF twenty muckraking nonprofit news organizations concluded a three-day meeting and produced a document that ended with this proud, hopeful sentence: "We have hereby established, for the first time ever, an Investigative News Network of nonprofit news publishers throughout the United States of America."

That final sentence meant different things to different people who were in the room, at the Pocantico Conference Center at the John D. Rockefeller estate outside New York City, let alone to the rest of the journalism world that was not. Nonetheless, it raised great expectations about what a network like this might be able to ultimately accomplish.

Administrative, editorial, and financial collaboration is the overall, explicit goal of the group. But to me and others, the most exciting potential of the Pocantico Declaration is the prospect of organizing the best investigative-reporting output and talent of member news organizations. That has never happened. Properly structured and led, the Investigative News Network could become *the* online destination for original investigative reporting.

Full disclosure: I was not just a participant at Pocantico, but a member of the conference steering committee along with the principal organizers, Bill Buzenberg, the executive director of the Center for Public Integrity, and Robert Rosenthal, the executive director of the Center for Investigative Reporting, and the conference moderator, Brant Houston, the Knight Chair in Investigative and Enterprise Reporting at the University of Illinois. As the original draftsman of the Pocantico Declaration before it was collectively debated and edited, who on the afternoon of June 30 also formally proposed to the group the name and the concept of an "Investigative News Network," I am obviously not objective about what transpired or what lies ahead.

Still, two dynamics reinforce this vision, in my view. First, the number of Investigative News Network member organizations—and thus the subject range, sheer volume, and potential public impact of available content—will increase substantially over the ensuing months, just as the member stations and programming content of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR) hugely increased after those national nonprofit networks were first established in 1970. (Because of space and lodging limitations at Pocantico, a stunning venue made available by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, a number of publishers of quality investigative reportage could not be invited.) Second, the network will inevitably become international, as numerous nonprofit news organizations exist around the world, many of them producing outstanding journalism.

Pocantico brought together an abundance of heavyweight journalistic, entrepreneurial, and management talent around a large, room-size table, including Sheila Coronel, the director of the Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism at Columbia University's journalism school and the founding executive director of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism; Brian Duffy, the director of investigation and enterprise reporting for NPR and former editor of *U.S. News & World Report*; Margaret Freivogel, the founder and editor of the *St. Louis Beacon* and a veteran reporter and editor for *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; Florence Graves, the founding director of the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University and the founding editor of *Common Cause Magazine*; Lorie Hearn, the founding editor of the new Watchdog Institute (see page 12), an investigative outlet in San Diego that will have a relationship with *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, where she spent a quarter century; Mark Horvit, the executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE); and Joel Kramer, the founding editor and CEO of MinnPost.com and former executive editor and publisher of the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*.

Not long ago, nonprofit investigative journalism organizations were regarded as novelties, capable of high-quality reporting but supported by philanthropic contributions rather than advertising, which was considered, among other things, unsustainable. Yet amid the carnage in commercial newsrooms, which has cost thousands of talented writers and editors their jobs in recent years, the number of nonprofit news organizations, and outstanding journalists working for them, has notably increased.

So too has the funding: At least 180 U.S. foundations have spent nearly \$128 million since 2005 on news and information projects, and half of that has been for investigative reporting by nonprofit centers, according to a recent report ("New Media Makers") by Jan Schaffer, the executive director of J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism. And those numbers do not include the massive foundation and individual funding given annually to public broadcasting.

All of this doesn't make up for what's been lost, certainly, but the dramatic de-

cline of commercial newspapers and the expansion of nonprofit journalism are obviously related. Roughly two-thirds of the nonprofit news organizations represented at Pocantico began because the commercial milieu for serious journalism had become, shall we say, professionally inhospitable. And half of the organizations at Pocantico began within the past three years.

An investigative-journalism ecosystem is emerging in which an increasing percentage of the most ambitious reporting projects will emanate from the public realm, not from private commercial outlets. That is a tectonic shift. Meanwhile, attitudes in the traditional media world are changing in significant ways, as indicated in recent decisions by two of its most venerable institutions. First, the Pulitzer Prize board in December 2008 announced that for the first time since their inception in 1917, Pulitzers may be awarded to news organizations that publish only on the Internet and which are "primarily dedicated to original news reporting and coverage of ongoing stories"; and that "adhere to the highest journalistic principles."

Six months later, in June 2009, at the IRE national conference in Baltimore, The Associated Press announced that the nonprofit cooperative will make investigative stories from four nonprofit news organizations—the Center for Investigative Reporting, the Center for Public Integrity, the Investigative Reporting Workshop, and ProPublica—available to its member newspapers.

THESE DEVELOPMENTS WERE FRESH in all of our minds at Pocantico, providing buzz and momentum and reminding us that we were part of something larger than our individual projects. Many of those present had first felt the buzz two weeks earlier at the IRE conference. While the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) couldn't muster enough money or people for its annual meeting in a recession year, IRE had more than eight hundred attendees and optimism and excitement filled the air. And IRE, thanks to the Knight Foundation, organized a special, eleven-hour-long meeting of the nonprofit investigative-reporting centers. There was heady talk by some of a "movement," and

maybe these atmospherics help explain why the strong personalities and egos of those assembled at Pocantico were remarkably restrained throughout the three-day meeting.

However, there were—and remain—some fundamental tensions between the priorities of the various participants. The newer startup publishers are understandably most worried about their economic viability. They want to establish administrative, legal, fundraising, and other new systems. Their forcefully articulated and continuing concern is that the investigative network could become a behemoth that siphons donor dollars away from state and local publishers and pushes their daily logistical concerns into the background. The older institutions, meanwhile, are necessarily interested in exchanging information and establishing greater "back office" ad-

An online brand for the world's best investigative journalism?

ministrative and financial collaboration between the groups. But they were also strongly motivated by the promise of joint editorial projects across the nation, and of increasing the power, brand, and earned revenue potential of shared investigative content. To the larger, more established operations, the new network would bolster the individual financial potential of the enterprise and its member organizations, not diminish them.

Sometimes the divergent positions at Pocantico felt like the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and there was even a little joking about that between sessions. But we had just seventy-two hours, and somehow we arrived at what I believe will be prove to be a historic agreement. That said, any vision must also be implemented. And the extent to which the network will be able to grow editorially, and to contract original reporting from respected freelance investigative

journalists—all on the way to becoming the online brand for anthologized and original investigative reporting—may be constricted by the more immediate exigencies facing the newer, smaller member organizations. The network's leadership and governing structure is key to overcoming this challenge.

None of us harbors any illusions about the grubby logistics of building a new institution. The staff sizes, annual budgets, and editorial capacities of the various nonprofit publishers in the U.S. vary widely, as does, frankly, the quality and quantity of their work and the actual extent to which they do investigative reporting. Newsgathering practices and standards of some sort must be established, a thankless job that the membership committee, chaired by Brant Houston, is handling.

Scott Lewis, the co-founder and CEO of Voice of San Diego, is the chairman of the sustainability subcommittee, which is conducting a basic assessment of member organizations' needs and capabilities. What are the best practices and shared strategies for fundraising, generating earned revenue, human resources, IT, general and liability insurance, corporate governance, etc.? I chair the content dissemination subcommittee, which includes an assessment of platforms, technologies, corporate and legal structures, and potential editorial collaborations. Bill Buzenberg is, among other things, spearheading the effort to obtain planning grants from a few foundations to support these activities over the next six to twelve months. The Center for Public Integrity is serving, as it did for the Pocantico conference, as the temporary fiscal agent for this burgeoning network until a 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organization is formed.

With the new Investigative News Network, we will have, at the least, the first broad-based, nonprofit news publishers association, its members collaborating administratively, editorially, and financially. At the most, well, use your imagination. **CJR**

CHARLES LEWIS, who founded the Center for Public Integrity, is the founding executive editor of the Investigative Reporting Workshop at the American University School of Communication in Washington. He is a contributing editor to *CJR*.

A Luddite's Virtual Book Tour

Get on Facebook, make a video, e-blast everyone you know

JUST BEFORE MY LATEST BOOK, *HOME GIRL*, CAME OUT IN JUNE 2008, THE Random House promotion team invited me in to discuss strategy. There, in an office reassuringly lined with blockbusters, we covered the usual terrain. Did I have contacts at television networks? Know any reviewers at the *Los Angeles Times*? We went over a list of who might blurb.

Then the marketing lady asked about my friends. I sheepishly admitted that I didn't have many intimates, maybe ten or so on my A List. But no, I had misunderstood. She meant friends as in Facebook. How many did I have?

"I'm nearly fifty," I sputtered. "I don't do Facebook."

"Get on," she counseled. "There's no book tour."

Unlike the old days, an appearance on the *Today Show* is no longer enough. If I wanted this book to become a best-seller—or just sell, for God's sake—we had to create online buzz. I should e-blast every acquaintance since childhood to drum up word-of-mouth. Random House also wanted an author Web site and blogs. Because the book straddled various genres—it is a funny memoir about our street in Harlem when it was a narcotics bazaar—we would hit the blogosphere from real estate to politics. The marketing lady produced a list of fifty-one sites to bombard, along with the traditional media.

But wait. There was more. We also needed a video trailer that would give a virtual tour of the house and characters featured in the book. "You must get Salami," the marketing lady said. Salami is a manic crack addict who spends much of the book threatening to invade my house. His antics, such as doing chin-ups on traffic lights, might attract readers. We would post the video on YouTube.

"Wow," I gushed. "You do all that?"

The woman eyed me, puzzled. "No. You do."

Thus was I jolted into the cyber age. Until the book, I had resisted any attempt to go digital, beyond the odd e-mail. I was raised on typewriters, sent my first foreign dispatch by Telex, and hell if I was going to stop editing by pen. My first-grader son sent text messages for me. I thought a "stream" had water and "viral" meant AIDS.

I fondly recalled the day, only a decade ago, when I published my first book, *Fragments of a Forgotten War*. Back then, people still asked if you had e-mail. The antediluvian promotion by Penguin involved actual face-to-face interviews. I gave readings in brick and mortar bookstores and was profiled in publications that used actual paper. What was all this nonsense about Internet celebrity?

Yet, I did want to sell this book. I was aware that newspapers were closing or shedding book sections. And so I enlisted my six-year-old son Anton to help set up my profile. He got me on Facebook, and then for good measure on Plaxo, Hi5, LinkedIn, Shelfari, Goodreads, Amazon.com, and the Harvard Alumni Association. (Anton urged me to join a Yu-Gi-Oh! chat room, but even I knew that was not the right demographic.)

Once I signed up, things didn't look that bad. I reconnected with people I hadn't seen since college—people who still liked to read books. Heartened by this brush with the twenty-first century, I found a young woman to design the Web site. My idea—author photo and text—was deemed "too 2007." She assured me that she could whip up something cutting edge in a week, and flipped through her Mac to show me sites where images danced and sang. Then she mentioned XHTML.

Me: What's that?

Her: It's like Hyper Text Markup Language—same expressive range, plus it conforms to XML syntax, a more restrictive subset of SGML.

Me: Right.


The video was more straightforward. A friend of the Web maven knew something about cameras and we rounded up the book's various characters to star. They all enjoyed their Warholian moments. Despite a bad hair day, the local matriarch agreed to hold forth. My son proclaimed me nuts on camera. Salami was especially keen—he showed up days in advance to get my advice on what to wear. (He was also confused about the nature of the video, muttering: "You tell Hollywood that Denzel Washington should play me.") Another crack addict—a literary fellow who likes to borrow books from us—recited an impressive stream of Latin, then got stage fright and hastily excused himself, mumbling something about a blocked toilet. My aged mother drove in from Queens to demonstrate her formidable parking skills, terrorizing the local drug thugs in the process.


But the filmmaker ultimately decided to leave these scenes on the cutting-room floor, as it were. He edited


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in some snazzy Klezmer music and uploaded the video on YouTube (<http://tiny.cc/WqjqC>).

Within days we got hundreds of hits, and e-mails from strangers chortling over the display. But few mentioned the book, which made me wonder about the video's impact on sales. The answer lay in my Amazon rating, which I checked so many times a day my husband suggested a twelve-step program. When I wasn't sneaking yet another peek, I struggled to learn Dreamweaver in order to manage my site. For someone who didn't know how to burn a CD, this process was even more excruciating than learning Russian grammar. Meanwhile, Random House lobbied the book at litblogs, which, I was assured, were as effective in shaping tastes as *The New York Times Book Review*.

"Readers Love Home Girl!" proclaimed the marketing lady, attaching sample reviews from something called LibraryThing. Great. Now I had to worry not only about *Publishers Weekly*, but also what Paperdoll and Bookmama had to say.

Even so, I appreciated this virtual populist revolt against the tyranny of the elites. Anyone with a laptop, apparently, could become a book reviewer. These citizen readers didn't care what *The New York Times Book Review* thought—they liked what they liked.

Greedy for more virtual coverage, I approached an online publicist, FSB Associates, which had created best sellers via Web buzz alone. Among its trophies: the wildly popular *The Prosecution of George W. Bush for Murder* by Vincent Bugliosi, which no mainstream press would touch initially. Could FSB work the same magic for me?

The publicist assigned to me, Julie, was nothing short of industrious. In ninety days, she placed sixty-eight online reviews and features, ten podcasts, and about a dozen syndicated reprints of essays linked to the book. Quite a show!

Yet, once the novelty wore off, my skepticism reemerged. I realized that online fans of *Home Girl* didn't necessarily embrace my best interests—making money. The ultimate betrayal came from Upfromsloth, a self-described

"reluctant debutante turned aspiring punk rocker turned Stepford wife." After extolling my writing, she recommended that readers get library cards. Library cards. "It's all free books!" she trilled. "For free! You don't have to buy them first!"

Day-by-day analysis showed that, minus a mention on Instapundit, the biggest sales boosts came from the traditional media—especially an appearance on *Fox and Friends*, followed by an excerpt in *The Financial Times* and a profile and review in *The Washington Post*.

After that, it becomes murky. Did a glowing review in *The Christian Science Monitor* account for one particularly good week, or was that because of an e-blast to twelve hundred people? Did anyone actually buy a copy based on the recommendation of Librarymeg?

I'll never know.

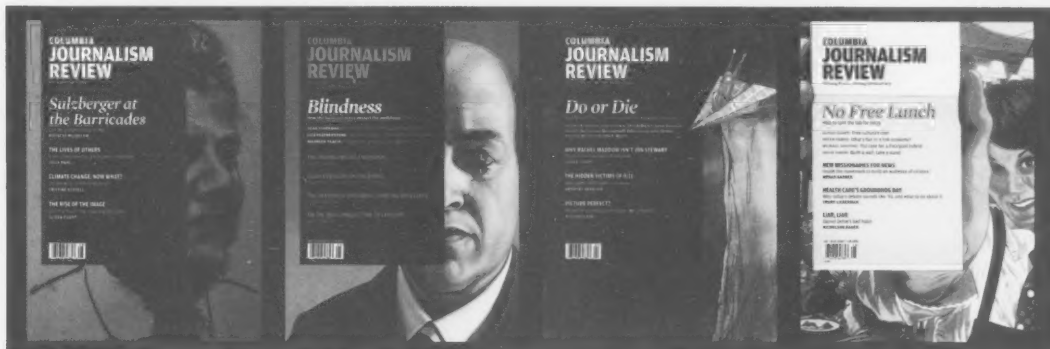
The biggest sales boosts still came from traditional media.

What I do know is that I'd like to get rid of some of my "friends," especially a woman whom I hadn't seen in thirty-four years who nags me to answer her e-mails. And that fan mail from strangers warms the heart, but then I feel compelled to produce considered, literary replies. And that's the problem with Facebook—it's so very public, and one can't exactly ignore the writing on the wall. Who has time to be in regular communication with hundreds of people? But I don't dare dump anyone just yet. The paperback only came out in July, and then of course there's the next book. **CJR**

JUDITH MATLOFF, a contributing editor to *CJR*, is the author of *Home Girl—Building a Dream House on a Forgotten Block* (Random House).

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Too Close for Comfort?

Tom Ricks and the military's new philosophical embeds

BY TARA MCKELVEY

Thomas E. Ricks has a photograph of a general—Ulysses S. Grant, looking haggard and defeated in Cold Harbor, Virginia—on the wall of his office. His shelves are filled with books about Dwight Eisenhower, William Westmoreland, and other generals. A husky, bearded, fifty-four-year-old with faded eyebrows, he looks a bit like a general himself, and sometimes talks like one. “I’d be wary of the media,” he says, describing how a commander might feel if a

journalist wanted to embed with his unit in Iraq. “And I’d also remind my troops that the media is one of the things that we’re fighting for.” Ricks is intimately familiar with the mindset of people on both sides of the great divide that separates the military from the media, and he can speak with authority about their different perspectives.

He is not a general, of course, but a journalist, and a respected one. He has spent nearly thirty years in the field, covering violent conflicts from Somalia to Afghanistan, and he has been a member of two Pulitzer Prize-winning teams. After nearly ten years there, he remains loosely affiliated with *The Washington Post* as a special military correspondent (he took a buyout last year), and is also the author of a blog, *The Best Defense* (ricks.foreignpolicy.com), and a tireless speaker and writer. He works out of a fourth-floor office at the Center for a New American Security, a Washington think tank on Pennsylvania Avenue, where on a recent afternoon he was

fiddling with a PDA on his cluttered desk and checking his blog while trying to ignore a ringing desk phone. He had, in fact, double-booked his media engagements for the day, which meant that he was meeting with one journalist (me) in his office, while another, an Australian radio reporter, called to interview him.

Ricks is mainly known for the two big books he has written about Iraq. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, was published in 2006 and soon became a classic work on the war. It is a blistering critique of Bush administration officials and their mishandling of the war, as well as of Pentagon officials who were slow to recognize the growing insurgency in Iraq and then seemed overwhelmed by the challenge of how to counter it. Then in *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*, published early this year, Ricks lauds the achievements of Petraeus and other leaders in the field of counterinsurgency.

Over the course of writing these two books, Ricks went from being harshly critical of the war in Iraq to being effusively complimentary about the U.S. efforts to turn things around there. In *The Gamble* he is particularly enthusiastic about counterinsurgency, an approach to small-scale war known in the military as COIN, which in its most recent incarnation places less of an emphasis on killing insurgents than on protecting the civilians and attempting to win their “hearts and minds.” It’s a subject that he continues to write about at the Center for a New American Security;

the institution publishes dozens of papers each year about the doctrine and is home to many former military officers who are among COIN’s leading proponents.

The dramatic change in Ricks’s writing about the military in Iraq reflects a broader shift that has taken place in the coverage of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The doctrine of counterinsurgency has received almost uniformly positive press coverage, at times making it appear to be the only possible avenue for the U.S. military, and in the process that coverage has cast it in the most positive light.

To his many fans, Ricks has deftly chronicled the monumental, long-overdue rise of counterinsurgency, a form of warfare that Americans are attempting to master in an age in which global terrorism and small-scale conflicts, rather than a cold-war enemy like the former Soviet Union, define the threats to the United States. To critics, however, he has all but become a spokesman for that doctrine—to the point

that he and other journalists in his circle have lost their outsider perspective and have become difficult to distinguish from the administration officials who are currently pushing a military approach that, in the eyes of these critics, is a huge global gamble.

"The events for which the Iraq war will be remembered probably have not yet happened," Ricks writes in *The Gamble*, and it is indeed too early to say whether the media's assess-

zines. He was hired by *The Wall Street Journal* in 1982 and served as its Pentagon correspondent, traveling to Somalia a decade later to write about U.S. troops in Mogadishu, his first assignment to cover the military overseas. In 1997, he wrote *Making the Corps*, a book with a somewhat romantic view of military service ("as gung-ho yet sensitive a treatment of the Marines as any Devildog could hope for," wrote a *Christian Science Monitor* reviewer; CJR was kind to the



The insider Tom Ricks, once the military's chief critic, now admires its new establishment. Is he part of it?

ments of the surge and the military's new counterinsurgency strategy have been prescient or misguided. But it is clear that journalists have been much more optimistic in their assessments of the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in recent months and years, and it is worth trying to figure out how this shift occurred. To what extent did the wars change, and to what extent did Tom Ricks and other journalists themselves change?

RICKS HARDLY SEEMED DESTINED FOR A CAREER AS A MILITARY reporter. He wrote poetry in high school and studied it at Yale, where he was an English major and from which he graduated in 1977. He grew up outside of New York City and in Kabul, where his father taught at university. After college, he moved to Washington and began to write for *The Wilson Quarterly*, *The New Republic*, and other maga-

zines. He was hired by *The Wall Street Journal* in 1982 and served as its Pentagon correspondent, traveling to Somalia a decade later to write about U.S. troops in Mogadishu, his first assignment to cover the military overseas. In 1997, he wrote *Making the Corps*, a book with a somewhat romantic view of military service ("as gung-ho yet sensitive a treatment of the Marines as any Devildog could hope for," wrote a *Christian Science Monitor* reviewer; CJR was kind to the

book in a March/April 2007 Second Read feature). Ricks traced the lives of several dozen new recruits and followed them through an eleven-week boot camp on Parris Island, South Carolina, and into their first year of service. The book helped convince Nathaniel Fick, who has served in Iraq and who was named CEO of the Center for a New American Security in June, to enlist.

While Ricks was at the *Journal*, he was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize in 2000 for a ten-part series about military spending. He moved to *The Washington Post* that same year, and in 2001 he and a group of reporters wrote a series about the U.S. response to the attacks of September 11 that won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting.

In 2003, Ricks went to Iraq, where he embedded with various military units and saw firsthand how the troops were operating in that country, and he continued to report there over the next several years. In many ways, he was appalled. The

soldiers seemed to be going about it all wrong, he thought, and there seemed to be little hope of defeating the insurgency.

Over time, officers he met described incidents of abuse and mistreatment of Iraqis. Soldiers sent him copies of e-mail, investigations, and reports about military actions in Iraq; he ultimately collected 37,000 pages of documents for his research. A significant number of Ricks's sources were advocates of counterinsurgency, and Petraeus himself, then a major general who had served as commander of the 101st Airborne Division in the early part of the war and also helped to develop Iraq's new military, was among them. Ricks

The Center for a New American Security, where Ricks is based, has strong ties to the Obama administration.

interviewed Petraeus and even his wife, Holly, as the war was unfolding, and he paid close attention to the doctrine of counterinsurgency that Petraeus was developing for the military. Petraeus and many of the other officers who spoke with Ricks had studied the mistakes of Vietnam. They had come to the conclusion that the military had been slow to respond to the insurgency in Southeast Asia, and that top officers had failed to understand that protecting the local population, rather than going after the insurgents, should have been their primary focus.

A voracious reader of military history, Ricks had absorbed such classics of counterinsurgency as T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which recounted the Arab revolt against the Turks. In Iraq, he got a real-life taste of its lessons. After a military convoy he was traveling with in April 2004 was attacked, for example, he recalled Lawrence's description of how insurgents had gone after the supply lines of an occupying army. While Ricks was working out of the *Post's* Baghdad bureau, he watched *The Battle of Algiers*, the controversial 1966 film about the French counterinsurgency in Algeria. "A few nights later I was out on a 4th Infantry raid in Baghdad's Jihad neighborhood, an area generally hostile to the U.S. presence," he wrote on Amazon.com in a Q&A about how *The Gamble* came to be. "The troops hustling down sidewalks, the cordon set up around a suspect's house, the difficulty in understanding what locals were saying and thinking, the helicopter clattering overhead—all could have been taken from this movie."

He included material that he collected from his sources in Iraq in articles for the *Post*, but felt that he could not really do justice to what he had seen in standard news articles. He stepped back from daily journalism and in one frenetic year produced *Fiasco*. It is a damning story of how and why

things went so badly for the United States in Iraq, and a harsh denunciation of the military. In his book, Ricks showed that the problems in Iraq came from the highest levels of command—including the president himself—who had failed to adequately explain why the United States had invaded Iraq or what it intended to achieve there. The U.S. military went into Iraq without a coherent strategy and, shortly afterward, ran into immense problems. The principles of counterinsurgency, such as protecting the local population and winning their hearts and minds, had not been the conventional wisdom in Washington or among top military leaders in Iraq, and Ricks argued that this was a fundamental flaw.

As Ricks tells it, during the early phase of the war, from 2003 to 2006, American troops raided the homes of villagers and rounded up large numbers of Iraqi men, many of whom were innocent, and placed them in detention facilities. Arguing that this violated basic principles of counterinsurgency, Ricks singled out one officer in particular for censure: General Raymond Odierno, who was commander of the 4th Infantry Division, deployed mostly in the Sunni Triangle north of Baghdad. Odierno has argued that the high level of enemy activity there inhibited a "hearts and minds" approach. In Ricks's portrayal, Odierno was an unequivocal disaster during this phase of the war. Instead of trying to win over the Iraqi people, "he hammered everyone," a retired Army general told Ricks, explaining that the soldiers in Odierno's unit had treated Iraqi civilians in a brutal manner. Another general said: "The 4th ID—what they did was a crime."

Even before he wrote *Fiasco*, Ricks had become a controversial figure among high-level military officials at the Defense Department. His critical *Washington Post* articles, which became the basis for *Fiasco*, apparently infuriated then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other officials at the Pentagon—so much so that a faculty member at the Army War College told his colleagues, in an e-mail to other faculty members in 2005, not to grant Ricks interviews: "We all need to avoid Tom like the plague." The faculty member eventually apologized, explaining that he had written the e-mail during a time when many were afraid of incurring Rumsfeld's wrath by consorting with Ricks. Many of the officers who had served in Iraq, however, appreciated, in a quiet way, the work that Ricks was doing: "I thought the book was very balanced and realistic," said Colonel Barry Johnson, who was at the time a military spokesman in Baghdad.

While Ricks was giving talks about *Fiasco* in the U.S., the situation in Iraq began to change dramatically—so much so that Ricks proceeded to write a sequel. Petraeus took over as commanding general in February 2007 and strategy in Iraq underwent a major transformation, largely in the direction that Ricks had long advocated. The U.S. sent in some 30,000 additional troops, and "essentially, early in 2007 the Bush Administration and the U.S. Army turned the war over to the dissidents, people like Petraeus who had criticized the way much of the U.S. effort in Iraq had been conducted for most of its duration," Ricks wrote in an April 2007 postscript to the paperback edition of *Fiasco*.

He went back to Iraq four or five times—Ricks himself is unsure of the count—while researching the new book. He

was impressed with what he saw. And by then Petraeus and others who had been his sources for *Fiasco*—including Peter Mansoor, a brigade commander in Baghdad, and Sean MacFarland, a commander in Ramadi—were playing key roles in the war. Ricks had extraordinary access.

IN MAY 2007, RICKS ATTENDED A MILITARY BRIEFING IN the Green Zone. When listening to briefings in the past, he had often felt that he knew more about the situation in Iraq than the briefers did. This time, he thought, “Wow, not only does this briefing strike me as accurate, it also is better said than I could do,” he explained on Amazon.com.

The conversations that Ricks had with Petraeus became a crucial part of his reporting for *The Gamble*. “The deal was that I would do several trips to Iraq during his time in command there, and have candid interviews with him and other officers, almost all of them not to be used until the end of 2008,” Ricks explained in an online *Washington Post* chat in February 2009. For *Fiasco*, Odierno would not talk to Ricks except at the very end of his reporting; this time, Ricks had repeated meetings with him. “To his credit, Odierno was very open and candid with me in the reporting of *The Gamble*,” Ricks told me. “He didn’t have to be. He was generous with his time and his thinking.” Ricks also spent a lot of time with David Kilcullen and Emma Sky, two aides to the generals, and was impressed with both.

Ricks sets up *The Gamble* as a drama. He explains how the war was going disastrously for years, reaching a nadir in 2005, but at the last minute a small group of smart military men, “dissidents” like Petraeus, were able to show people at the highest levels of the U.S. government what the problems in Iraq were and how they could be fixed. Soldiers, for example, must get out of their heavily fortified bases and engage with the Iraqi people. The dissidents wanted more troops, to tamp down the violence. Petraeus emerges as a courageous, determined leader who was able to impose his vision of how to fight the war on the tradition-bound Army. Thus, the book ultimately celebrated the military effort in Iraq.

And from *Fiasco* to *The Gamble*, Ricks’s portrayal of the military underwent a striking change in tone. In the first book, several of the military officers, and especially Odierno, were described as tyrannical, or at least overly aggressive, in their approach to Iraqi civilians; in *The Gamble*, however, Odierno is depicted as an enlightened leader with a keen sense of what needed to be done and the importance of watching out for the local population.

Meanwhile, another officer, Colonel Gian P. Gentile, now a history professor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, underwent a transformation in the opposite direction. In *Fiasco*, Gentile comes across as a thoughtful, conscientious officer who is aware of the importance of cooperating with the Iraqi people and ensuring that the soldiers in his unit are respectful of them. He told his convoy drivers to travel slowly, at fifteen miles per hour, for example, because that was “less disruptive to Iraqis and sends a message of calm control,” Ricks wrote. In *The Gamble*, however, Gentile appears to be an ineffective leader oblivious to the concerns of Iraqis,

surrounded by soldiers who do not seem to care about the principles of counterinsurgency.

Yet Ricks’s portrayal of Gentile in both books was based on Ricks’s observations during the same three- to four-day period in February 2006, when he was embedded with Gentile’s unit at Forward Operating Base Falcon in Baghdad.

In *The Gamble*, Ricks described hearing gunfire “between Iraqi forces and someone else” one night while staying at Falcon, and the following morning he tried to speak with some of the Americans who worked on the base about the “small firefight.” But nobody seemed to care. Their boss, Gian Gentile, was “FOB-centric,” a commanding officer explained, using the acronym for Forward Operating Base, and making it clear that Gentile seemed oblivious to the Iraqi people who lived outside of the compound. Gentile says that Ricks’s portrayal of him and the soldiers at the base was a “caricature”: “hunkered down on FOBs, happy and content to be stuffing their faces with ice cream.” Moreover, says Gentile, the gunfire that Ricks heard happened all the time—“that was fricking Route Jackson,” he says, referring to a main highway where Iraqis manning a checkpoint often fired warning shots.

As it happened, after the publication of *Fiasco*, Gentile had published a series of articles that were critical of counterinsurgency. In one of Gentile’s articles, an August 2007 *Washington Post* op-ed titled IN THE MIDDLE OF A CIVIL WAR, he described how Iraq was being divided along sectarian lines and argued that the divisions had made it difficult, if not impossible, for the American forces to provide enough stability to allow the Iraqis to rebuild their country. The following month, Gentile argued in *Armed Forces Journal* that the theoretical framework of Petraeus’s counterinsurgency doctrine, which was outlined in the military’s new *Field Manual on Counterinsurgency*, was simplistic and even dangerous. “The essence of war, even counterinsurgency war, is fighting,” Gentile wrote, explaining that the new field manual struck him as naïve. It placed too much emphasis on protecting the population, in his view, and not enough on shooting the insurgents. He also claimed that the surge was not providing sufficient troops to fight in Iraq. In this and other articles, Gentile was deeply pessimistic about the chances for U.S. success in Iraq.

Carl Prine, a reporter for *The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*—who is also a board member of a nonprofit press group, Military Reporters & Editors, as well as a friend of Gentile’s—believes that Ricks went after Gentile in part because Gentile had decided to challenge a faction that Ricks enthusiastically supported. And he is right. Ricks himself concedes that this was one of the reasons Gentile was presented negatively in *The Gamble*.

Ricks says his portrayal of Gentile was “like a developing photograph” that became sharper with time. Part of that developing picture: Ricks was traveling in Iraq when Gentile’s work began appearing in U.S. publications, and he heard officers talk about the articles in a disparaging way. “One of the themes that came up in those interviews was that he was judging their war without having seen it first-hand, or, in their view, even understanding what they were doing” in this new phase of the war, Ricks explained in an e-mail. He

told me that he thought Gentile was not doing a good job in Baghdad in 2006, and that he and many other leaders in the military at the time were failing. But he said he also took issue with Gentile's writing about the surge and the new counterinsurgency in Iraq, adding, "He's presented negatively in *The Gamble* partly because of his op-ed."

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, RICKS HAS BEEN AN ENTHUSIASTIC supporter of counterinsurgency and has engaged in robust discussions about its theoretical foundation and current tactics on his blog. He writes and researches in his office at the Center for a New American Security, which has become counterinsurgency central in Washington. The center is home to the top proponents of the doctrine, a group of one-time military dissidents who have become in many ways the core of the new military establishment. The organization was founded in 2007 and has close ties with the Obama administration, providing much of the underpinnings of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and South Asia.

The center is headed up by John Nagl, the charismatic author of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, who has, for example, promoted the idea of a military advisory corps as a way to enhance the military's ability to assist government leaders in other nations. President Obama has embraced Nagl's proposal, explaining that an advisory corps "will enable us to better build up local allies' capacities to take on mutual threats." Another important figure at the center is CEO Nathaniel Fick, who wrote a book, *One Bullet Away*, and has taught classes in counterinsurgency in Kabul. Meanwhile, Army Captain Andrew Exum, whose blog, Abu Muqawama, has been described as the "go-to for the COIN set," has also become part of the organization. And David Kilcullen, the handsome, highly-quotable Australian who was an adviser to Petraeus, is a close friend of Nagl's and also a member of the center's board of advisers.

President Obama has embraced the doctrine of counterinsurgency for Iraq and Afghanistan and has hired a number of people from the center, including one of its co-founders, Michèle Flournoy, the undersecretary of defense for policy, along with two former fellows, Shawn Brimley and Vikram Singh, Flournoy's advisers. Kurt Campbell, who had been the think tank's chief executive officer, is serving as assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the State Department. In addition, James Miller, a former senior vice president at the center, is principal deputy undersecretary for policy at the Defense Department, and Susan Rice, a former member of the center's board of advisers, is U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

As often happens in Washington, a number of prominent journalists have also become attached to the think tank, and in a relatively brief period of time: Robert Kaplan, who writes for *The Atlantic*, is a senior fellow. David Cloud, a former *New York Times* and *Politico* journalist; David Sanger, chief Washington correspondent for *The New York Times*; and Greg Jaffe, Ricks's replacement at *The Washington Post*, all spent time with the center as writers-in-residence. Ricks fits easily

into this world, giving interviews, working on policy papers, blogging, researching a new book on the history of American generalship, and attending events at which journalists and the new military establishment seamlessly mix, from panel discussions to softball games.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, a few critics have dismissed Ricks as a counterinsurgency advocate. "The reality, Tom, is that you're no longer the traditional reporter we once counted on to deliver objective analyses of defense issues," Military Reporters & Editors' Carl Prine posted recently on the blog Abu Muqawama. "Over the past year, you've hawked a controversial book on the Iraq war, fired up your own blog and cashed paychecks from a partisan think tank." (In fact, the center is an independent and nonpartisan research institution.) People who work at the Defense Department have also wondered about Ricks's public role. "Is Tom a reporter, or is Tom an op-ed guy?" asks Colonel David Lapan, director of the Defense Department's press office. "At some point, he became more of an author than a reporter, I think." Similar questions have been raised on Ricks's blog. Ricks pays attention to the criticism, but he believes it is misguided. "I'm trying to provide the honest comment," he says. "I don't really care how you label it."

Counterinsurgency may turn out to be the right choice, and, in its newer, more humane version, the right approach for our dangerous times. But history shows that success in such warfare is difficult to come by. Algeria and Vietnam, in particular, stand as hard lessons. And even when counterinsurgency is handled in a more sophisticated way, and emphasizes the protection of the local civilians, it remains bloody and expensive to fight an enemy on his own terrain over an extended period of time. A successful strategy requires language and cultural skills. And usually the enemy can play the game better, settling disputes, building schools, and providing other social services. An invading force may have more equipment and money, but the insurgents will always have the advantage of place. As some insurgents have put it: you have the watches, but we have the time.

When journalists place too much emphasis on *how* to fight an insurgency, their work can obscure the larger question of *whether* to fight one. One hopes that the journalists assigned to monitor the doctrine's progress are able to report on it, as well as on the larger question of America's role in the world, judiciously and maintain their distance from its proponents.

At the moment, they aren't. Instead, many journalists have been sold on counterinsurgency and are simply reporting on the doctrine's repercussions, such as President Obama's efforts this summer to scale back on F-22 fighter jets, a symbol of the cold war military, or his plans to put additional resources into low-intensity warfare in South Asia and other regions. Concerns about the fact that counterinsurgencies last for decades, incur tremendous costs, and yet rarely work have been set aside. Granted, there never was much debate over counterinsurgency in the media, but at this point the discussion, however sporadic it was, seems to have ended. **CJR**

TARA MCKELVEY, a senior editor at The American Prospect, is the author of *Monsterring: Inside America's Policy of Secret Interrogations and Torture in the Terror War*.

Disappearing Iraq

After a period of openness that benefited both the military and the media, the door is closing

BY JANE ARRAF

Ah, the happy world of Iraq, as seen through U.S. military press releases. Iraq could be exploding—in fact, parts of it still regularly are—but the press-release view would still be that of policemen graduating, officials cutting ribbons, and grateful citizens leading security forces and their U.S. advisers to weapons caches. The few press releases that do bear any relation to the reality we reporters see on the ground (“Iraqi Special Operations

Forces Continue Operations Despite Budget Challenges”) are almost instantly recalled. The regular background briefings and press conferences that once helped put the ongoing violence into context are so last year. In a country with 130,000 U.S. troops fighting a war that still costs tens of billions of dollars a month, the military might as well be invisible. And for the most part, it seems to want it that way.

This wasn’t the case a short time ago. From early 2007 to late 2008, when Colonel Steven Boylan, the public-affairs officer at the U.S. Army’s Battle Command Training Program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was General David Petraeus’s spokesman in Iraq, part of his job was to lay down a more realistic scenario for the American public. Faced with the certainty of more American casualties as the U.S. launched offensive operations as part of its military “surge,” the generals told their officers to engage with the media.

Petraeus “told the commanders that sixty percent of the

fight was to be for and about information,” says Boylan. “In the area of media, he expected that the commanders would be open and accessible to the media. If needed, they would send their helicopter to LZ [Landing Zone] Washington, pick up the reporters, meet the helicopter when it landed in their area, talk with them, make sure they saw what they wanted to and needed to, and then fly them back to LZ Washington so that they could file their stories.” Boylan’s other goal was to improve trust with a press corps disillusioned by talking points that, in earlier phases of the war, consistently contradicted what they could see with its own eyes.

That effort to court the media seems extraordinary now. On January 1, 2009, the end date of the U.N. resolution that was the legal basis for the presence of U.S. troops, Iraq assumed full sovereignty, and American soldiers became heavily armed guests. Next came the June 30 deadline for U.S. combat troops to withdraw from populated areas. These shifts seemed to leave military public-affairs officers, and many commanders, at something of a loss to explain the role of the thousands of troops still in the country. With the main military effort shifting to Afghanistan, the military finds itself in the disconcerting position of still being heavily involved in Iraq but unwilling to acknowledge it.

Mostly they’ve retreated into non-communicativeness, and worse. Reporters who visited an Iraqi camp near Baghdad after January 1 were asked by the military not to photograph the U.S. soldiers supporting the Iraqis, to avoid giving the “wrong impression.”

Does this matter? Yes. This is more than journalists’ angst at a declining story or a residual sense of entitlement fostered by what now seems a golden age of military-media relations. At a minimum, most of us who have covered this war for the past six years want to make sure its painful lessons aren’t lost, and that we don’t forget the ongoing cost. Forgetfulness is a danger. According to the Pew Research Center, by March 2008, only a little over a quarter of Americans knew that more than four thousand U.S. servicemen and women had been killed in Iraq, let alone more than thirty thousand injured. (As of mid-August, the total number of Americans killed was 4,318.)

This latest phase has coincided with both the financial crisis and turmoil in the media industry. *Time* magazine was the latest bureau to shut its physical bureau here, in June. The TV networks maintain skeleton staffs—often with no



It's all good Lieutenant General Charles Jacoby's first interview in Iraq was with *The Colbert Report*.

correspondents. Still dangerous, Iraq has become a way station for new reporters on their first foreign assignments. For the most part they expect very little from the military, and that's generally what they get. This lack of access means that journalists—and by extension, Americans in general—are much less able to determine what's happening there beneath the surface. And in Iraq, almost everything important happens beneath the surface.

Iraq is no longer raging with violence, but it is a broken country. More than a million of its citizens have fled, a few of them with government money. Many government ministries, divided among political and sectarian factions under a system devised by the U.S., are barely functioning. A budget crisis is depressing everything from expansion of the army to the repair of decrepit schools. In the bigger picture, the U.S. has found itself in the middle of Kurd-Arab tensions it helped create by disbanding the Iraqi Army and deploying Kurdish forces to secure unprotected areas in 2003. All of this in a country pivotal to U.S. interests in the region.

Although its role has diminished, the U.S. military is still involved in almost every facet of Iraqi society, particularly in rural areas, where soldiers, marines, and special forces do everything from mediating disputes to providing drinking water to conducting combat operations. Counterinsurgency operations have essentially been placed off limits to the press. Reporters asking to cover specific missions are directed to ribbon cuttings. This reduced access and reduced engagement with reporters has perpetuated the convenient fiction that the servicemen and women in Iraq are simply waiting around to go home. They're not.

The U.S. still has perhaps the most transparent military in the world. Almost no other country allows the kind of

scrutiny on the ground that the U.S. allows reporters during combat operations. Yet a confluence of factors—relief that Iraq is out of the news, the reality that the U.S. is taking a back seat, and the press-averse commanders who are no longer being required to engage with the media—has had the same effect. In the waning days of this six-year-old war, young men and women are being killed out of sight and apparently out of mind.

JOURNALISTS IN IRAQ CHERISH THE MEMORY OF EMBED invitations from the days when the military was courting the media. They seem like quaint anachronisms today. The best of them read like spa menus—offering different options for one-, two-, or three-day stays. Now reporters must fight for military approval and then potentially spend days waiting for flights, all for uncertain access in the end. This has led many reporters to abandon embedding as a reporting tool.

Colonel Boylan, who saw the length of the average media embed shrink from more than five days to less than two after he left Iraq, has a different perspective on the decline of embedding. News organizations face cutbacks and shrinking staffs, he says, as well as declining reader interest in the war at home. "I think there is a tiredness on the part of the units with a microscope looking over their shoulder when the reporter isn't willing to put in the time or effort to get to know who they are," he says. "The embed process for the most part is dead." The part about the shrinking staffs is certainly true. About two dozen reporters from U.S. news outlets are in Iraq on average, a fraction of the number at the height of the war.

Yet the military is increasingly reticent to deal with those

who do remain. Even driving onto some military bases for interviews requires embed approval—a form which asks reporters, including those based in Iraq, to submit samples of their work and story ideas. Coverage is often killed by bureaucracy.

Embedding aside, the turnaround time for requests for basic information has gone from the same day, normally—essential for most stories—to three or four days, or more. An acknowledgement that the requests have even been received is considered a victory. Six years into the war, the public-affairs offices for entire Army divisions in Iraq send out contact details to journalists that indicate they have “no commercial number.” A note at the central press office says, “News media representatives are always encouraged to call to check on the status of their query.” The phone number listed routinely disconnects callers when they enter the extension. U.S. officials occasionally refer reporters’ queries to Iraqi officials. But some of those Iraqi officials then ask how the reporter got their name and number, and refer them back to the U.S. military. It would be amusing if it weren’t so disconcerting.

Baghdad is still a tale of two cities: the Green Zone, where most public-affairs officers and many military and State Department staff spend their entire time in Iraq, and the rest of Baghdad, where the Iraqi and Western reporters live. A mid-level officer who had been deployed in the Green Zone for the better part of a year recently wondered to me how it was that Iraqis fill their cars with gas since she had never seen a gas station (and presumably the long lines that go with them). Another embassy person admonished guests invited to a reception not to come too early, seemingly unaware that it’s impossible to determine how long it will take to get through the multiple checkpoints from what U.S. officials still call “the red zone.”

The elaborate system of controls keeping U.S. forces, embassy staff, and contractors well inside the protected zones where the U.S. military and embassy are based also helps keep journalists out. In the broad-brush view of the military rules, all reporters and their local staff are considered potential suicide bombers. At a parking lot where journalists are dropped off to be escorted into Camp Victory, the military takes away cell phones—essential for coordinating pick-ups.

American reporters since last year have been denied the access badges that are given to any U.S. contractor. The badges prevent them from having to wait in areas most vulnerable to suicide bombers in order to enter the Green Zone. That is one reason most Western reporters have boycotted the new press center inside the Green Zone. That and the several intensive body searches required before you get in. I am glad to be able to report some progress here: a letter from the Baghdad-based media hand-delivered to General Raymond Odierno in June resulted in a promise that a limited number of the badges would be issued to the Western media.

The basic U.S. message here is that Iraq is safe again. That is debatable. The twenty-minute ride from the airport to the Green Zone, on what has become one of the safest roads in Baghdad, is nonetheless considered too dangerous for U.S. officials, who fly in instead. The heavily armored shuttle used

for the ride to the Green Zone by embassy staff members who can’t get a helicopter flight still requires body armor and a helmet.

ONE OF THE IRONIES IS THAT AS COVERAGE OF THE U.S. military has waned, the military has taken on more complex tasks.

Many of the U.S. troops appear light years ahead of where they started. The first troops I covered in the spring of 2003 jumped out of planes into northern Iraq and were so badly prepared that they spent the night huddled together to keep from freezing, after being told they were landing in desert. Among the standouts I met was the sergeant who told me, “This is my interpreter,” patting his rifle when I asked how they got by without someone to translate for them. And the non-commissioned officer who told me earnestly when I’d asked why he’d volunteered to fight in Tallulah: “I like explosions.”

One benefit of closer proximity to the military—so much harder to come by now—is that after spending time with soldiers, you realize that for every comment like that one there’s a sergeant who knows more history than you do. Two years after Fallujah, during one of those interminable waits for a convoy, I listened in admiration to two noncommissioned officers explain to a third the definition of “wasta”—the concept of using influence to get things done that is essential to understanding how things work in the Middle East.

But if the sophistication of the troops has increased, it’s not always mirrored among military public-affair officers, who tend to have far less contact with Iraqis. At a press event earlier this year at Saddam Hussein’s former palace at Camp Victory, a buffet laid out for the mostly Iraqi reporters prompted the usual question about what meat they were being served.

“It’s ham,” said the press officer. “How do you say ‘ham’ in Arabic?” The Iraqis politely demurred, backing away from the table.

Early this year, at the transfer-of-authority ceremony for the second-highest-ranking general in Iraq, responsible for all ground forces, only two Western reporters of the dozens in town decided it was worth the hours of waiting and security checks to cover the event, where the intensely private Lieutenant General Lloyd J. Austin III turned over his duties to the even more private Lieutenant General Charles Jacoby Jr. It was made clear to the American reporters who were there that they could expect even less accessibility from the new deputy commander. In fact, Jacoby’s first interview in Baghdad—three months after arriving there—was not with a journalist. It was with Stephen Colbert, during a taped appearance for *The Colbert Report*.

Some officials say the war is over. It isn’t. It is a different war and a much different story—one that Americans are being encouraged to forget. **CJR**

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Take a Stand

How journalism can regain its relevance

BY BRENT CUNNINGHAM

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, as the press faced criticism for failing to use the catastrophe to initiate a national conversation about race (or class, or infrastructure, etc.), Jonathan Klein, the president of CNN/U.S., defended his network's coverage to Eric Deggans, the press critic at the *St. Petersburg Times*: "We go in looking for stories," he said, "not issues which need to be raised." It reminded me of something Steven Weisman, a former

New York Times correspondent, said to me in 2003 as we discussed whether American journalism's awkward embrace of objectivity had helped stifle a robust discussion in the run-up to the war in Iraq about what might happen in the aftermath of that war: "Journalists," Weisman said, "are never going to fill the vacuum left by a weak political opposition." In other words, if the Democrats weren't going to challenge the White House on the complicated issue of the war's aftermath, neither was the press.

The idea at the heart of both of these statements—that journalists are little more than bloodless keepers of the record—which has served and protected but also severely hamstrung the press in this country over the last hundred or so years, increasingly feels like a cop-out. And as the so-called legacy media—the mass, mainstream media—struggle to survive and remain relevant as their business model fails and their competitors multiply, it is a cop-out that could

have dire consequences for the future of public-service journalism.

The rhetoric of American journalism describes an adversarial fourth estate, a redoubt for professional skeptics who scrutinize authority in the name of the public and help keep the public discourse honest. As long as our newspapers enjoyed quasi-monopolies and the evening newscasts were a national touchstone, the moth-eaten reality of this self-image was easily ignored. But the hard truth is that the press mostly amplifies the agendas of others—the prominent and the powerful—and tends to aggressively assume its adversarial role only when someone or something—a president, a CEO, an institution—is wounded and vulnerable. (Even some of the most important journalistic work of recent years—the exposures of warrant-less wiretaps and CIA ghost prisons—came after the Bush White House had begun its precipitous slide in the polls.)

Such straightforward record keeping is still, of course, a legitimate part of the press's role—tell us what our leaders say; tell us what happened today. But it is the easiest role for the press to fill (even easier now that technology has made *everyone* a potential keeper of the record), and one that is aggressively catered to by a public-relations apparatus that permeates every public and private institution, emitting an endless stream of incremental developments and story frames and pegs that keep deadline-driven reporters busy, busy, busy. This equation leaves far too little room for the

press's other, more important, roles: investigator, explainer, and, I would add, arbiter of our national conversation—the roles, in other words, that will not be filled in any comprehensive way by the swelling ranks of amateur or part-time journalists.

For evidence of how this kind of reactive coverage can lead the press (and the nation) astray, consider the coverage of the economy—not over the last year, which has seen some important work in a time of crisis, but reaching back to the 1990s, when investment regulation was quietly dismantled (Glass-Steagall), NAFTA was enshrined without a thorough public airing of probable consequences, the World Trade Organization protests were treated as street theater, and first the Internet wizards and then Wall Street's titans were elevated to the altar of infallibility.

Yes, there were exceptions. There always are. The debate that simmers still over whether the press properly raised



the alarm about subprime mortgages, derivatives, and the rest is largely built around those exceptions.

But what was the broad economic narrative, and the assumptions beneath that narrative, that was driven home day after day, year after year, in ways large and small, subtle and overt, in the news columns and on the opinion pages, on the relentless loop of cable news? A belief in the power of unfettered markets to make our lives better. The New Econ-

The hard truth is that the press mostly amplifies the agendas of others—the prominent and the powerful.

omy. The End of History and the Triumph of Free-Market Capitalism. The Ownership Society. It was the celebration of men who make money, who master those markets, and of the citizen as consumer and nothing more. This was the agenda of power in the U.S., from Ronald Reagan to Bill Clinton to George W. Bush, from Martin Feldstein to Robert Rubin to Alan Greenspan; and it was the agenda that the mass media broadcast and, directly and indirectly, endorsed—even if they did, on occasion, manage a piece that cried foul. As my colleague Dean Starkman ably demonstrated in our May/June issue (“Power Problem”), the business press failed to challenge the conventional wisdom that prevailed at the institutions that so damaged our economy.

If ever there were a moment for our press to begin to change this dynamic, to embrace a mission more in keeping with the ideals of public service and an adversarial fourth estate, it is now. America is at a perilous juncture in its history, but one that is ripe with opportunity, too. The mythology of the nation—exceptional, above the taint of history—has been undercut by a terror attack, two botched wars, the reality of torture, a flooded city, a wounded economy, staggering inequality, a shameful health-care system... the list is long. It has been undercut, too, by the emerging realities of the twenty-first century: a multipolar world, transglobal problems that no amount of debt-funded escapism can keep at bay, a realization that America must lead, but cannot dictate. America has created systems—legal, political, educational—that have much to admire, but they are not sacrosanct. In short, many of the ideas that we take for granted are not the only good ideas, or necessarily the ones best suited for every set of circumstances. On many fronts, the circumstances are decidedly different from those that allowed this notion of American exceptionalism to persist, fundamentally unchallenged, for so long.

The expression of this opportunity, this need to, as *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert wrote, “stop being stupid,” was everywhere last fall and earlier this year, as the financial crisis deepened and President Obama took office. Thomas Friedman—not exactly a thorn in the side of conventional wisdom—wrote, “We don’t just need a bailout. We need a reboot. We need a build out. We need a buildup. We need a national makeover.” Matt Miller’s new book, *The Tyranny of Dead Ideas*, promised to “illuminate where today’s destructive conventional wisdom came from and how it holds our country back.” Yale economist Robert Shiller, writing in September 2008 in *The Washington Post*, said, “Whenever the public endures a crisis, ordinary citizens start to wonder how—and whether—our institutions really work. We no longer take things for granted. It is only then that real change becomes possible.”

Such moments, born of crisis, tend to pass quickly, however. During the oil shocks of the 1970s, the air was thick with talk of weaning ourselves from foreign oil. I remember writing a school report on all the fabulous new sustainable sources of energy that were in the offing—wind, hydro, etc. And following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, America vowed to set aside the narcissism of the 1990s and pay more attention to the wider world. And after Katrina we were going to really do something about all that poverty we were surprised to discover in our midst. Indeed, once the Dow begins nosing back toward ten thousand, the window of opportunity for fundamental change may close.

Barack Obama was ushered into office as a president who “got it,” who understood that many of our systems were in need of fundamental change. But already there are signs that he may not have the stomach for the conflict such change requires: his failure to address the skewed incentives at various levels of our financial system that helped to produce the current crisis; the timid cost-containment strategies in his health-care agenda; the lack of a bold vision on infrastructure, etc. Time will tell.

Meanwhile, American journalism, too, is in a protracted moment of painful change. Both its business model and its sense of mission are in full retreat. Much experimentation is under way, with different financial-support structures, narrower editorial missions, collaborative projects, etc. There is an urgency, a humility, at news outlets about the need to rethink things that is long overdue.

So the press needs a new mission, and the nation needs someone to help initiate and lead the discussion of what kind of place America will be in the twenty-first century. It is not at all clear that our best news outlets have the will to become true arbiters of our public discourse, but given the increasing inadequacy of the journalistic status quo, and the nature of the challenges facing the country, such a mission shift could offer a crucial way forward for both the press and the public.

A Different Dissent

For the press to lead that discussion will require that it make a form of dissent more central to its mission. Not the tedious

dissent of partisan rhetoric, but rather dissent in the sense of refusing to accept that the range of possible solutions to the nation's problems must necessarily come from the centers of power and influence—the White House, Congress, the think tanks, corporate America. As we have seen time and again—on issues like campaign finance, health care, agricultural policy, and social welfare—these institutions are too wedded to the status quo to lead a discussion that is broad and fearless enough to challenge the systems and assumptions that shape America's politics, its economics, and its civic and social life.

Such a mission would mean radically realigning a newsroom's resources and priorities toward the goal of broadening the discourse on important issues—even if it required narrowing the scope of what it covers. The press would have to pay less attention, for instance, to breaking, event-driven news and more to sustained coverage of ideas and—crucially—solutions. It would have to stop reflexively marginalizing ideas and voices that come from the fringes simply because no one “official” is embracing them. It would have to rekindle the notion that journalism is not just a check on power, but, when necessary, its adversary. It would have to crusade for some things, and denounce others. News outlets would have to explain themselves and their decisions, and be clear about what they stand for and what they stand against.

Does the press have the will, and the means, to become a true arbiter of our discourse, to help set a national agenda?

In short, they would need to convince the public, by words and deeds, that they are on its side.

Not every news outlet would aspire to help lead the national conversation—or the various regional and local conversations—but some would. Such an effort could be a way for our most ambitious news outlets to distinguish themselves in an increasingly cacophonous and uneven information culture.

Take mass transit, as just one example. During the public debate over the auto-industry bailout—and in the protracted effort to pass the stimulus package—precious little was said about what role public transportation might play in our future, even though it was an elephant in the room. Among the circumstances that make this issue so difficult for the press—and the politicians—is that it taps into our national

mythology: modern America was built around the automobile, and the car is central, for better and for worse, to our sense of ourselves as a nation of free agents. But the reality is that we have less than 5 percent of the world's population and yet we are the second-largest producer of carbon dioxide behind China—and our automobile culture is at the center of that unwholesome picture.

On January 5, *The New York Times* published a short editorial, *A PITCH FOR MASS TRANSIT*, that urged President Obama to “give mass transit—trains, buses, commuter rails—the priority it deserves and the full financial and technological help it needs and has long been denied.”

That just isn't enough from our most important news outlet on such a crucial and complicated issue. Why not a crusade for mass transit? Why not an ongoing narrative—in the news columns and on the editorial page—that attempts to force the issue, in all its complexity, into the national consciousness and onto the national agenda? The kind of thing that newspapers do so well in projects and series—the stories that win awards—but with regular installments over months and years, however long it takes for the nation to figure out the best and most thoroughly considered course of action on mass transit. It wouldn't work perfectly, but it could work.

The crusade could introduce us to the most creative thinking from the rest of the world on how to design and execute communities around pedestrian traffic and public transit. Even though French President Nicolas Sarkozy's ambitious (some would say fantastical) notion to re-imagine Paris and its suburbs as “Le Grand Paris,” an integrated, sustainable city knitted together by green space and mass transit, has shrunk in the face of political and financial roadblocks, the very boldness of it is instructive in light of the baby steps being contemplated in the U.S.

The crusade could bring us the ideas of Bill Mitchell and his colleagues at the Smart Cities research group at MIT. Mitchell, writing last fall in *Building Design*, a U.K.-based magazine for architects, argued that the real issue is not cars, but personal mobility and how to provide it effectively and efficiently:

First, separate intercity and in-city mobility. Cars, designed to serve both, are great at neither. Let high-speed trains and the like handle intercity travel, while ultra-lightweight, simplified, much lower speed, battery-powered electric vehicles deal with short-range urban mobility. There are no significant technological barriers to moving quickly in this direction.

Second, rethink energy distribution. Petrol has high energy density, but in batteries, it's much lower. And that's what, so far, has killed the electric car. But ubiquitous electric grids in cities offer the possibility of recharging cars in their parking spaces. This vastly reduces battery requirements and enables much lighter, cheaper, simpler electric cars, without unacceptably sacrificing performance.

Third, organize urban electric cars in mobility-on-demand systems like the Velib bicycle system in Paris. Racks of public-use cars would be provided at closely spaced sites across the service area. If you want to go somewhere, you walk to a nearby rack, swipe a card, pick up a car, drive it to a rack near your destination, and drop it off.

Closer to home, such an effort could explore, for instance, the idea of converting General Motors from a “purveyor of private transportation hardware to a planner, fabricator, and supplier of a renewed, nationwide public transportation system,” as described in a short op-ed, published in *The Oregonian* last December, by Tim Smith, an architect in Portland.

Between July 10, 2002 and May 25, 2003, *The New York Times*, under the leadership of editor Howell Raines, published sixty articles (three on page one) and editorials about Augusta National Golf Club’s policy forbidding women members. To me, the lesson of Raines’s Augusta crusade is not that it was an ideal case study—it was, in fact, the kind of personal jeremiad that is exactly what we don’t want from our serious journalists. The lesson is that the stodgy mainstream press is in fact capable of forcing an issue onto the national agenda and keeping it there. One of those front-page pieces carried the headline CBS STAYING SILENT IN DEBATE ON WOMEN JOINING AUGUSTA. Why couldn’t our newspapers and TV news outlets have some regular way of reminding the public that President Obama, or House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, or whomever, is refusing to address the mass-transit questions? Or the immigration questions? Or the campaign-finance questions? Perhaps, along the lines of something Matt Miller suggested in these pages in 2003, there could be a box in a lower corner of the front page, or a short recurring on-air editorial: DAY 25: OBAMA STILL MUM ON LIGHT-RAIL.

Maybe the mainstream press is at this point too beaten down, too spooked by the prospect of its own demise, to manage such a bold overhaul. It’s true that even in its decades of dominance, the modern American press struggled with how far it was willing to stray beyond the narrow confines of the conventional wisdom that it helped to create. In his 1973 book, *Radical Visions & American Dreams*, for instance, Richard Pells examined the tortured effort by intellectuals on the left to fundamentally change the national conversation during the Great Depression—to place public welfare above private gain (sound familiar?). Their forum was opinion magazines such as *The Nation* and *The New Republic*. Pells barely mentioned the mainstream press.

The Nation and *The New Republic* are still with us, of course, and some will argue that the mission I describe is more at home in their pages—and in other idea magazines and the proliferation of agenda-driven Web sites and blogs—than in the mainstream newspapers and broadcast outlets. But I would suggest that, while opinion publications do publish deeply reported investigations and analyses, such outlets will not be the birthplace of the kind of wide-ranging, practical, and sustained discourse that we need. Part of the reason is that—like the informational silos of the blogosphere—they too often preach to the converted. But part of it, too, is that the political debate in this country is too polarized to allow it. Rightly or wrongly, there are great swaths of the citizenry who just won’t hear it if it comes from *The Nation*, and others who won’t hear it if it comes from the *National Review*. Plenty of people won’t hear it if it comes from *The New York Times*, either, but the paper’s reach and authority are con-

siderably broader—both at home and abroad—than that of these partisan outlets.

There is a way to lead the conversation without being politically partisan—to initiate the debate, shepherd it, report out the various positions, ideas, and arguments; to reach conclusions based on the understanding and expertise that are developed in this process, about what ideas and policies make the most sense for the collective good. Then make those ideas and policies, and the assumptions that support them, dominant narratives in the day-to-day coverage. Through it all, let the public see how those conclusions were reached.

Objectivity is a trap that allows demagogues on the right and the left to dismiss the press as hopelessly biased.

Our best bet for such a process is via a professional press that strives (even as it repeatedly fails) to adhere to an ideology that is more reformist and progressive than politically partisan. Plenty of people have attempted to define this journalistic ideology. In his 1979 book *Deciding What’s News*, sociologist Herbert Gans described a series of “enduring values”—such as “altruistic democracy” and “responsible capitalism”—that unconsciously shape what we think of as news judgment. In his memoir, *Somebody’s Gotta Tell It*, Jack Newfield put it in more plainspoken terms than Gans:

Pick an issue. Study it. Make yourself an expert so you won’t make any stupid factual mistakes. Figure out who the decision makers you want to influence are. Name the guilty men. Make alliances with experts. Combine activism with the writing. Create a constituency for reform. And don’t stop till you have achieved some progress or positive results.

People of good faith can have dramatically different definitions of what constitutes, say, “responsible capitalism.” But the point is that there is an important set of values between feckless attempts at objectivity and unbridled political partisanship.

The values of such a reformist mission are very much alive in many of the journalists who inhabit our mainstream newsrooms, if not in the newsrooms themselves. And it is crucial that the DNA of investigative, public service journalism be central to the experimentation going on both within and outside the mainstream. It’s not a coincidence that some of the most ambitious experiments designed to revive a muckraking posture in the press right now are in the hands of refugees from the mainstream: Paul Steiger (former edi-

tor of *The Wall Street Journal*) and his crew at ProPublica; Charles Lewis (*60 Minutes*) and his Investigative Reporting Workshop at American University; Andy Hall (*Wisconsin State Journal, Arizona Republic*) at the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism; Joe Bergantino (ABC News) at the New England Center for Investigative Reporting—even Josh Marshall at Talking Points Memo began in the tar pits of old media, writing for magazines, including this one.

Of the People

Yet the mainstream press seems far removed from this ideal. Public ownership has proven incapable of supporting public-interest journalism—let alone adversarial journalism—as the press's central purpose, and the pursuit of objectivity has become a trap that sets the best-intentioned reporters and editors up for the failures of false balance and he said-she said story frames. Furthermore, it allows demagogues on the right and the left to dismiss the press as hopelessly biased when it fails to achieve "objectivity." The homogeneity of the mostly white, middle- and upper-middle-class decision-makers in our newsrooms, meanwhile, coupled with the offend-no-one ethos of their corporate managers, have smothered (publicly, at least) the kind of outrage that one should expect in the face of betrayals of public trust—such as the one on display in our current financial crisis.

Even if the will to assume a leadership role in our public discourse existed, and we had owners who encouraged it and accepted its costs, financial and otherwise, it seems unlikely that the press could execute this new mission alone. Much of the experimentation under way envisions some sort of collaboration, either with other news outlets or with the public, or both. The press needs help; it needs the people. It needs to engage with the public broadly and persistently—to be on the public's side in an obvious and fundamental way.

In the early years of this country, the press and the public were organically connected—the press literally emerged from the conversation in the public houses and squares. "The 'public,'" wrote the late media scholar Jim Carey, "is the God term of the press, the term without which the press does not make any sense."

Of course, it's easy to romanticize this notion. In the Colonial town square, not all members of the public were created equal; there were elites (educated, wealthy) and non-elites (uneducated, non-white, female), and their opinions did not have equal weight in the public discourse. But the point is that the press was, at one time, very much a part of its communities, and as our nation grew more populous and more complex that connection began to break down. By the middle of the twentieth century—with the advent of the notion, pushed by Walter Lippmann and others, that the workings of government and society had grown too complicated for the common man—American journalism had abandoned its God term. The relationship with the people was replaced by a one-way conversation, from the press to the public, which persisted until digital technology turned that conversation on its head. Again, Carey: "Journalists primarily serve as conduits relaying truth arrived at elsewhere.... They transmit the judgments of

experts, and thereby ratify decisions arrived at by that class—not by the public or public representatives." Having embraced Lippmann's philosophy, Carey suggested, "the press no longer serves to cultivate certain vital habits: the ability to follow an argument, grasp the point of view of another, expand the boundaries of understanding, decide the alternative purposes that might be pursued." He published this essay, "The Press, Public Opinion and Public Discourse" in 1995.

Jim Amoss, the editor of *The Times-Picayune* in New Orleans, understands this need to connect with the public. Much has been written and said about how, after Hurricane Katrina nearly destroyed their city, the staff at the *Times-Picayune* got angry and began fighting to save southern Louisiana with a sense of activism that was atypical in the cautious mindset of modern American journalism. They became advocates for their community. Amoss is quick to insist that the story of his newspaper during and after Katrina has been mythologized a bit, and yet, "I think the lesson in what happened to us is that newspapers must exude a sense of being of their communities," he says. "To want for it what you want for yourself and your family. The opposite end of that spectrum is that readers sense when a newspaper is detached and not really of the community. Even before Katrina, this newspaper tried to achieve this, but it really came to the forefront after Katrina. And the readers have not forgotten it." (It's worth noting that this activism has brought a degree of financial success, too, as the *Times-Picayune* has one of the highest market penetration rates in the country.)

Issues of coastal restoration and storm protection are central to the paper's coverage. "We are constantly championing them and finding new ways to bring them to the forefront of the public discourse," Amoss says.

The press needs help; it needs the people. It needs to be on the public's side in a fundamental and obvious way.

It isn't that the *Times-Picayune* has become a thunderous voice of dissent in any classic sense—in most ways it remains a fairly conventional newspaper. But the narratives on these core issues are driven by the paper's commitment to figure out what is best for its city and region, and as a result the narratives are central to the public discourse in New Orleans and along the Gulf Coast, regardless of whether the mayor's office, or the oil companies, or the state legislature are providing pegs for the stories. The *Times-Picayune* drives the agenda.

OffTheBus demonstrated that there are thousands of people (at least) who have a genuine interest in improving journalism.

How might a newspaper do this without a tragedy like Katrina to force the issue? One way to think about what happened to the *Times-Picayune* is that circumstances overtook it, left it with no choice but to refine and reassert its mission. In a sense, the same thing is happening to journalism broadly: a storm of change is blowing away the old ways.

We have an opportunity, then, to build a twenty-first-century version of that Colonial-era connection between the press and the public. But it's going to look radically different. In our March/April issue, Amanda Michel wrote about her experience directing OffTheBus (OTB), a national citizen-journalism project that covered the presidential campaign, and more specifically about what the professional press might learn from OTB. I remain extremely skeptical of the notion that "citizen journalism" can ever replace professional journalism. Doing serious journalism well is difficult and time-consuming. It is not a hobby; it is a job. To suggest that people will just squeeze it in around other jobs, kids, meals, sitcoms—around life—is absurd.

But unlike most citizen-journalism efforts, in which the focus of the participants is on throwing in their proverbial two cents, OTB was about collaborative reporting, and as such it contained the seeds of something that might be useful. It took twelve thousand volunteers—doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, etc.—and coordinated their various skill sets to gather and analyze information that writers then turned into articles. It was like the Time Inc. model of journalism writ large. And it worked, if unevenly, breaking some stories but more important, adding narratives and perspectives to the campaign discourse that we didn't get from the professional press. The editors at OffTheBus—the professionals in this pro-am equation—supplied the editorial judgment and set the priorities, deciding which stories to pursue and then enlisting legions of volunteers to help them report those stories. But they also listened to their members and let the information that came from the ground up shape their editorial judgment—just as the best editors listen to their reporters in the field.

Of course, this all happened around the most dynamic presidential election in decades, and so it would be easy to dismiss it as something impossible to replicate, in an ongoing way, in a professional newsroom. And it *would* be difficult to replicate, but not impossible. OTB's success—and

more important, the ways it succeeded—challenges the debilitating notion that the public has nothing but disdain for the press, and is largely uninterested in quality news and information.

It demonstrated that there are thousands of people (at least) in this country, of various political leanings, who have a genuine interest not in becoming journalists, necessarily, but in improving journalism—in gathering news and perspectives from beyond the Beltway, beyond Wall Street, beyond officialdom at all levels. Michel says that what became clear over time was that, for many of OTB's volunteers, the interest in improving journalism ran deeper than their role in the campaign. "The mainstream media narratives are very powerful, and early on many of our volunteers emulated the style and approach of the MSM," she told me. "But the longer they participated in the project, the more they pushed back against those narratives."

There are significant managerial differences, of course, between leading a group of trained reporters on a big story and leading packs of amateurs, however smart and motivated they are. But the potential upside is hard to deny. In a time of shrinking resources, such a press-public network could extend the newsroom in significant ways.

By definition, for instance, it would alter the top-down flow of news, countering—at least a bit—the press's over-reliance on official sources. As a result, it would help to broaden and diversify the coverage. The perspectives of nurses, for example, are largely excluded from press coverage of the health-care debate, as the writer Suzanne Gordon has documented and expounded on over the past twenty years. This is true despite the fact that nurses, much more so than doctors, are the ones most closely connected to the patients' (and news consumers') experience. "When reporters cover the latest developments in experimental cancer treatment," Gordon wrote in *The Nation* in 1999, "they will routinely question the doctors on the impact such treatments have on cancer cells, but never the nurses who can talk about their impact on patients' lives."

The opportunities here seem limited only by our imagination. Michel, who now works at ProPublica, said that, while OffTheBus didn't specifically track the demographics of its volunteers, her sense is that they skewed toward middle-class professionals. But she also said that it would be possible, over time, to "really target your demographic." Think of how difficult it is for the press to cover the poor or the working class in sustained and meaningful ways—ways that get beyond single dimensions and the middle-class assumptions that dominate our newsrooms. Imagine how different the coverage of the economy in this country could have been over the last thirty years if more of the press narratives had been coming from the ground up, rather than the top down.

The promise of the OTB experiment is not only that it could help extend the reach of the emaciated American newsroom, but that it could create an alliance between the public and the press. So that when a news outlet concludes that some important mass-transit ideas are not being addressed by the leadership in Congress or the White House, for instance, it would have twelve thousand—or one hundred

thousand—engaged citizens (née consumers) adding to its crusade with e-mails and Tweets and phone calls and Facebook pages of their own. Such a scenario has the potential to radically change the decision-making dynamic at the federal, state, or local level.

The vast majority of Americans, of course, won't want to participate in such an alliance. But let's say instead of twelve thousand, *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times* got twelve hundred volunteers around the country from a broad range of backgrounds. They could be organized into reporting teams around issues, or specific stories. There could be journalistic boot camps akin to Camp Obama, or an expansion of programs like the *Savannah Morning News's* now dormant Neighborhood Newsroom program, which identified citizens from underserved communities and trained them to be neighborhood correspondents.

Such pro-am collaboration is under way in other professions, notably scientific research. Galaxy Zoo, for instance, used unpaid volunteers to classify images of galaxies into various types, in an effort to help astronomers understand how galaxies evolve.

It would be crucial that the professionals not simply view their citizen partners as free labor—twelve thousand interns there to do what they're told. They would need to embrace the entire public as potential colleagues and fellow citizens.

In other words, journalism would need to begin to change the narrative about itself. It is a narrative that has been created by the press's own failures, its arrogance and shortsightedness, but also by a forty-year campaign by segments

of our information environment each day. Early News Literacy efforts are centered on the classroom, but, as Megan Garber suggested in our July/August issue, an obvious next step is to invest in a broader public-education campaign on how good journalism affects our individual and collective lives, and what our communities would be like without that journalism. It's baffling that the press has never really attempted to make its case to the public. Now it can't afford not to.

Toward a New Critical Culture

In 2000, Marshall Berman, writing, appropriately enough, in *Dissent*, bemoaned the lack of a vibrant critical culture in America, and longed for a way to connect the various strands of grassroots-level ferment—in politics, music, literature, etc. By "critical culture" he meant "one that struggles actively over how human beings should live and what our life means." He was dismissive of the mainstream press's ability to lead such a culture, but he also had no answer for who else might lead it. "One big problem for any critical culture to come is, how will its concerns and its ideas be transmitted and shared?" he wrote.

Nine years on, with blogs and social networks, Twitter and Facebook, we have the connectivity that Berman sought; but for that connectivity to be in service of a critical culture will require a committed arbiter—a leader—of the cultural conversation. Part of Berman's critique was that "too many ideas, coming through too many channels" was a bigger problem than the banality of so much of what was produced each day by our mass media. "As communications technologies metastasize," he wrote, "it will be even harder not to be flooded out."

The spirit and strategies that drove OffTheBus will continue to evolve, and someone—or many someones—will eventually get it right. In that 1995 essay, Jim Carey suggested that "we must turn to the task of creating a public realm in which a free people can assemble, speak their minds, and then write or tape or otherwise record the extended conversation so that others, out of sight, might see it. If the established press wants to aid the process, so much the better. But if, in love with profits and tied to corporate interests, the press decides to sit out public life, we shall simply have to create a space for citizens and patriots by ourselves."

We need the established press to not just aid this effort but to lead it. The marriage of all this connectivity with an activist mission of public-service journalism could cut through the layers of banality that clog not just the mainstream media but also the rest of our sprawling information environment. Such a marriage could organize and lead the kind of critical culture that Berman and Carey sought. It could begin to establish a public agenda that reflects the struggle over how America should live—over what America means—in this new century. **CJR**

We need a public agenda that reflects the struggle over how America should live, over what America means, in this new era.

of the political right to vilify the press as a "liberal" cabal, and a more recent and less coordinated effort by elements on the left to portray it as a corporate stooge. Changing this narrative will not be easy. There is considerable hostility and distrust toward the mainstream news media, but some of it is the result of ignorance about what the press does and why. The partisan press-haters will always be with us, but the nascent News Literacy movement is attempting to rectify the pervasive ignorance about the values and methods of journalism—to instill in young citizens the importance of the best kinds of journalism, and how to distinguish it from the less-reliable, less-intellectually honest stuff that floods

BRENT CUNNINGHAM is the managing editor of the Columbia Journalism Review. This piece was made possible in part by a grant from The Fund for Constitutional Government, for which we are grateful.

The New Energy Beat

It's global as well as local, environmental as well as financial.

Can embattled newsrooms see the big picture?

BY CURTIS BRAINARD AND CRISTINE RUSSELL

On a Monday morning in January, less than a week after his inauguration, President Barack Obama signed two memoranda designed to improve automobile fuel efficiency. "These are extraordinary times," Obama told an audience gathered in the White House's East Room, that call "for swift and extraordinary action. At a time of such great challenge for America, no single issue is as fundamental to our future as energy."

Although he acknowledged that his predecessors had "sounded the alarm about energy dependence for decades," the new president undoubtedly recognized that he sits atop a rare confluence of political, industrial, and social will to dramatically alter the ways this country gets its juice. Despite that will, Americans remain reluctant to reduce their consumption of the cheap fossil fuels that were largely responsible for raising standards of living during the twentieth century. After several years of stories about the threats posed by melting ice caps and rising seas, global warming has lost some of its ability to inspire people to change their ways when it comes to energy consumption. Indeed, President Obama's speech took place against the backdrop of a Pew Research Center poll, which found that "global warming" and "the environment" had plummeted to the bottom of a list of twenty public priorities. Energy, on the other hand, ranked sixth—below Social Security and above health care.

So it was no accident that Obama couched that January speech in terms of immediate threats to "national and economic security—compounded by the long-term threat of climate change." His goal was to reframe the question of energy reform, downplaying the moralistic, save-the-planet appeal that some voters had grown weary of in favor of one that emphasized national security and economic growth.

Obama's decision to recast the connection between climate change and energy reform had been hashed out in July 2008, while he was still chasing the Democratic nomination. Even then it had become clear that environmental stewardship and the mitigation of global warming were not the best selling points for a low-carbon economy. "This stuff needs to pop more," he told his aides on the way out of a meeting with a group of energy and utilities executives and economic and scientific experts, according to a piece in *The Washington Post* in May by Steve Mufson and Juliet Eilperin. "The Chicago meeting marked a turning point in his thinking," they wrote.

It was a turning point for the press, too. As the presidential campaign dragged on that summer, Obama and the other candidates replaced climate with energy references in their speeches and comments. The press did the same in its articles and broadcasts. With gas prices soaring to record highs, the war in Iraq marking its grim five-year anniversary, and the housing market in free fall, the country's attention was once again trained on oil and the influence it exerts over both the economy and national

security. Stories about "energy independence" and renewable energy plants creating employment in old manufacturing towns were on the rise.

The press had rediscovered the energy beat. And now journalists, too, must make the subject "pop."

The emergence of the modern energy beat began in the 1970s in response to oil crises—and gas shortages—in which concern about dependence on foreign oil struck the American political and consumer consciousness. The Carter administration and Congress established the Department of Energy in 1977. Carter installed solar panels on the White House roof and pushed for development of alternative energy sources. But when the Reagan Revolution rolled into town, the solar panels came off the White House and the wheels came off the energy story.

"Energy went fallow after the Carter administration," recalls John J. Fialka, a longtime energy reporter for the *Wall*

Street Journal's Washington bureau before becoming editor of *ClimateWire*, a specialty Web news service. "It was marginalized and almost disappeared" even if it was periodically resurrected over the years by the "ups and downs of gas prices."

The Obama administration's push to develop alternative energy sources echoes some of the Carter era promise (and lost opportunities), and the political, business, and environmental landscapes are once again awash with optimism about the future of clean energy. While the global financial crisis has dampened that enthusiasm, this time there is the added urgency of making up for lost time. The president and the Democrat-controlled Congress are making the issue "pop" by pouring money, via the economic stimulus plan, into the creation of "green jobs" and backing the American Clean Energy and Security Act, passed by the House in June. The bill cloaks a controversial cap-and-trade scheme to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions under the mantle of energy security.

This is reflected in the media coverage as well. An analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* bears out the strong emphasis on energy, particularly political stories related to the administration's agenda and economic stories related to costs and various energy sources. A Lexis-Nexis database search found that from October 1, 2008, to March 31, 2009, the combined stories in both papers that mentioned "energy" in their headlines or lead paragraphs were about three-and-a-half times more frequent than those mentioning "climate change" or "global warming," and three times more frequent than those mentioning "environment."

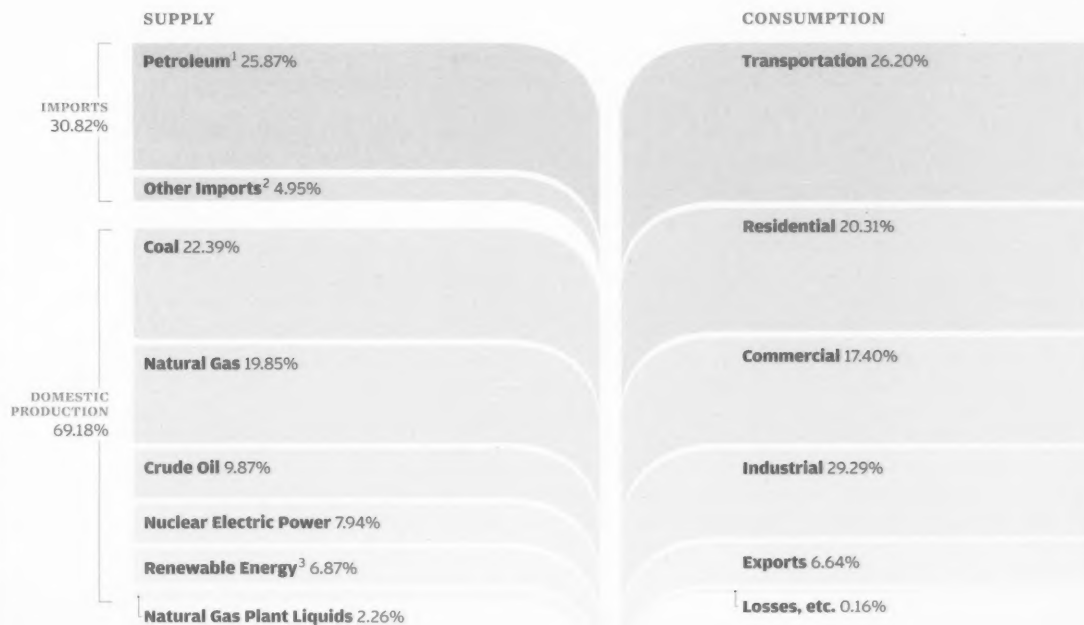
For the press, the reemergence of energy as a public priority offers many opportunities. It is an umbrella for stories about the economy, national security, and climate. For the public, as well as for cautious editors, energy is a more tangible story than any one of those categories alone. Not every town has a Goldman Sachs, a research university, or a major energy company, but they all have local suppliers and consumers of electricity, natural gas, and liquid fuels. About half of American energy consumption is for transportation and residential use. And nothing grabs the public more than pocketbook energy stories.

But the energy beat presents significant challenges, too. For instance, those pocketbook stories need to push beyond price fluctuations to help consumers understand the complex nature of energy. "I see these gas-price stories that just drive me up the wall," says *San Francisco Chronicle* energy reporter David Baker. "Reporters will get the latest update from AAA and they'll just go out to the gas station and fill up a story with nothing but pissed-off-motorist quotes. We need to tell people why they're paying what they're paying."

Doing that requires expertise in subjects as diverse as investment banking, lobbying and legislation, and materials science. The only way to cover energy comprehensively is to collaborate, both across beats within the newsroom and with specialty news outlets that can broaden and deepen a newsroom's expertise and resources—especially at a time when those resources are under pressure as never before.

To assess the press's recent efforts to master the energy beat,

Powering up Energy in the U.S. and how it's used



¹ Crude oil and petroleum products

² Natural gas, coal, coal coke, fuel ethanol, and electricity

³ Conventional hydroelectric power, biomass, geothermal, solar/photovoltaic, and wind

we use three snapshots that provide instructive examples of the challenges this crucial story brings: California, because it has led the nation in renewable energy policy; coal, because it is the nation's most abundant, but dirtiest source of electricity; and wind, because it is the nation's fastest growing source of clean energy, but is struggling to achieve large-scale distribution.

California Dreaming

Like climate change, energy is a highly partisan issue. Many Democrats embrace a panoply of renewable energy sources while Republicans tend to favor developing coal, oil, gas, and nuclear energy. But geographic bias affects coverage as well. Californians are more likely to encounter stories about solar power than about coal, and vice versa for Virginians. The trouble with such fragmented coverage is that as policymakers and the energy industry push forward with the development of clean-energy strategies, it will be incumbent upon journalists to connect what is happening in their part of the country to much broader national and international goals. Such goals include revitalizing domestic manufacturing and the nation's export economy, providing relief from foreign oil imports, and weaning us off fossil fuels to a degree that is environmentally meaningful. So the press must reconcile coordinated, nationwide targets for change with not-in-my-backyard fights related to wind farms and transmission lines in one place; dependence upon mining and drilling jobs tied to coal, oil, and gas in another; and a lack of public transportation in most of the country.

No state has done more to give the clean-energy story "pop" than California. Its long battle to win a waiver from the Environmental Protection Agency that would allow it to raise its fuel efficiency standards above federal levels, as well as its landmark 2006 law to limit carbon-dioxide emissions, pushed the federal government to take such regulatory and legislative initiatives seriously. Silicon Valley's investment in clean energy start-ups and the birth of activist Van Jones's green-jobs campaign in the San Francisco Bay Area also helped to make the Golden State a gold mine for energy reporters. "There aren't any energy stories here without national implications," says Margot Roosevelt, the *Los Angeles Times's* environment reporter. Indeed, California is a ubiquitous theme in coverage from coast to coast, but too much of that national coverage exhibits a certain cognitive dissonance, explaining the ambitious goals of the various energy initiatives without including an all-important status report. As a result, the reality check is left mostly to California news outlets.

"Meeting state energy targets has been a huge driver of the green-tech industry out here," says the *Chronicle's* David Baker. "But it's also been a huge headache for utilities, and when banks stopped lending, a number of projects shut down." In July, for example, a \$1.5 billion plan to build a six-hundred-mile, high-voltage transmission line to deliver solar, geothermal, and wind power to fifteen municipal providers across northern California collapsed under an array of economic, aesthetic, and health concerns. A dismaying setback for meeting state and district renewable energy targets, it was news from Mount Shasta to the Mojave, but hardly showed up on the national media's radar. That oversight leaves news

Journalists must connect what is happening in their part of the country with the broader national and international story.

consumers outside of California with an oversimplified sense of what is happening in a place where our twenty-first century energy realities are being put to the test first.

Of course, local reporters are also learning as they go. Oregon, much like California, is something of a national repository for our environmental hopes and dreams. But last summer, Oregon Public Broadcasting set out to challenge the state's "vaunted green reputation" with an energy series called *The Switch*. Reporter Christy George says that she and her colleagues developed a series of metrics—renewability, cost, contribution to the total power supply—with which to evaluate the state's energy economy. "It forced us to do some honest, side-by-side comparisons of the different energy sources," she says, "and led in our very first story to the shocking—to most of us—realization that Oregon gets about forty percent of its power from coal." That fact challenged a misconception in the state, as the first story in the series explained, that most of Oregon's power comes from "nice, clean hydroelectric from the Columbia River." As with coal, the true figure for hydropower is about 40 percent.

Coal's Mark

The importance of coal may have surprised Oregon's journalists and readers, but elsewhere it is a way of life. Nationwide, coal accounts for almost a quarter of total energy consumption, about half of our electricity use, and more than one-third of our carbon-dioxide emissions. The environmental impact of that dependence has received a fair amount of media attention recently, including coverage of the pollution in Tennessee and Alabama resulting from the rupture of waste ponds that stored heavy-metal-laced coal ash residue, as well as the latest installments in the long-running battle over regulation of mountaintop mining. Ken Ward Jr., an environment reporter at the *Charleston Gazette* in West Virginia, says that such stories are important and complement coverage, from Utah to Pennsylvania, of coal's mark on the planet. What's often missing, he says, is a more direct evaluation of coal's present and future importance to our power supply: connecting the dots between environment and energy.

Although there is some indication that America is moving away from coal—most new power plants will use natural gas, according to the federal Energy Information Administration—its consumption is expected to grow in the U.S. for the foreseeable future (and skyrocket in China and India). Coverage of this nascent shift away from coal has been more dependent on political drama than on data. Stories crop up each time a pro-

posal to build a new coal plant is rejected or a representative of the coal industry says that such rejections threaten jobs. Entering reports that provide more depth on each side's position, and what could be done to resolve the disputes, are rare.

The fight to get the American Clean Energy and Security Act through Congress has been emblematic of this problem. The legislation's passage in the House in June depended largely on a compromise with Democrats from coal-, oil-, and gas-producing states. When the lead negotiator for this faction, Rick Boucher, a Virginia Democrat, introduced a key amendment that would, as he told *The Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, "create the opportunity for increasing coal production," many national and regional outlets followed the story. But as the *Gazette's* Ward put it, the story line was often: "Conservative, Blue Dog Democrat from coal country uses his political muscle to get what he wants. There was much less about what Boucher really wanted and why."

What Boucher wanted, among other things, was federal support for carbon capture and storage (CCS), a controversial technology that, in theory, would eliminate the heat-trapping emissions from coal plants by burying them deep underground. This is the idea behind so-called "clean coal." Boucher wants CCS because the United Mine Workers wants it, a point that Ward has tried to flesh out at the *Gazette*. It is not that the union necessarily denies the science behind global warming or the need for clean energy, he says. Rather, the union is simply trying to protect coal jobs and still meet national emissions targets (should they become law).

Of course, there is nothing simple about it. The technological feasibility of large-scale CCS, which is highly uncertain, is something that the press has largely overlooked. "We need to tell our readers very clearly what the uncertainties about a piece of technology are, what the time frame is for resolving those uncertainties, and what our alternatives are if that technology doesn't work," Ward says.

That last point is especially relevant to the national media, which are fixated on reporting the latest cost-benefit analyses of the strategies for weaning the nation off fossil fuels. Many of those estimates—from governmental organizations, think tanks, and special interest groups alike—foresee a "manageable" economic burden, but they all also assume that technologies like CCS and biofuels will be widely available. Those are bold assumptions, but the media rarely challenge them or ask what the environmental and economic implications would be if any one of them doesn't pan out. In that respect, coverage of wind and solar power is somewhat simpler—we know that the technology works. According to a recent (and little-covered) National Academies of Sciences report, the main barriers to expanding wind and solar power are their high cost, a lack of transmission capacity, and sustained policies (such as production tax credits) that encourage wider deployment. In other words, the challenges are primarily political and economic rather than technological. Still, explaining all that is a big challenge for journalists.

Blowing in the Wind

Press coverage of technologies such as wind often relies more

on pronouncements from politicians and the business community than on hard truths from technical experts. A case in point is billionaire oilman T. Boone Pickens's campaign to promote homegrown clean energy as a way to wean the U.S. off foreign oil. Since unveiling "The Pickens Plan" in July 2008, he has benefited from mountains of free media in addition to the tens of millions he has reportedly poured into advertising. A centerpiece of the plan was his highly touted—and heavily covered—commitment to build the world's largest wind farm in the Texas panhandle. But when Pickens quietly shelved the plan—at least temporarily—with \$2 billion in wind turbines already on order, the coverage was far more cursory. An AP story last November, in which Pickens mentioned at a conference that he was putting the wind farm project on hold, received little attention. Anniversary stories this summer on the Pickens plan noted the wind farm's demise, but provided little substantial coverage of what killed it: the financial and technical problems of getting new transmission lines to link his remote West Texas wind turbines to the Texas electrical grid. For that matter, why weren't there stories along the way about this large and very plausible obstacle to the Pickens plan?

Transmission lines are not the only problem with the development of wind power. There's the long start-up time, the high capital investment costs, and debates over environmental and aesthetic concerns, particularly in places like Cape Cod, where local groups have fought a proposed offshore wind farm for eight years. There's a selective-numbers issue, too. On the up side, "wind power accounted for 4.2% of all new electrical generation added to the U.S. grid last year," as Bryan Walsh noted in a piece in *Time* magazine in June called "Can Wind Power Get Up To Speed?" But it has a long way to go. "Wind still makes up less than 3% of America's total electricity generation," Walsh wrote. "Even at current rates of growth, that figure is unlikely to change soon."

Without both numbers, the coverage is overly optimistic. Take the *Des Moines Register's* reporting on President Obama's Earth Day trip in April to Trinity Structural Towers, a wind turbine manufacturing plant in Newton, Iowa. Obama touted his ten-year, \$150 billion clean-energy plan, predicting that an estimated 250,000 jobs and as much as 20 percent of the country's electricity would come from wind by 2030. The *Register* quoted these numbers but failed to add the president's own caveat about the tiny percentage of power that wind currently provides. The emphasis was on the boon for Iowa and a state official's enthusiastic comment that, "Iowa companies will have opportunities wherever the wind is."

Energy is a major local story for the *Register*, whose sole Washington reporter specializes in agriculture, energy, and climate, while a local reporter covers the agriculture and energy business in Iowa. The two collaborate on a blog called Green Fields, which deals with everything from the G8 summit to local commodity prices. "Renewable energy is big business," says Dan Piller, the local reporter. "I try to focus our coverage on profit and loss."

By approaching energy primarily as a business or politics story, however, the paper risks inhibiting big-picture coverage. What seems to be falling between the cracks is a more comprehensive examination of the economic, environmental, and

technological hurdles in Iowa to meeting Obama's ambitious clean-energy targets.

In Delaware, the state's largest newspaper, *The News Journal*, has benefited from a more coordinated approach to the energy story that emanates from the top. "Energy is the hub of environmental coverage because spokes out of that wheel impact climate change, fuel our industry, homes, and vehicles and directly affect our quality of life," says executive editor David Ledford. He has made energy and environment coverage a newsroom-wide priority, adding resources to create a new All Green To Me Web site in February and improving coordination between the paper's environmental, energy, and political reporters and editors.

The paper's coverage of the proposed Bluewater offshore wind farm, which could become one of the nation's first operational projects, is a good example of how the *News Journal* attempts to put energy in a broader context. The coverage has examined not only the dollars-and-cents of wind energy but also the long-term public health and environmental tradeoffs between conventional coal-burning plants and wind and solar energy. Ledford believes that his paper's multifaceted coverage helped generate public support for the project: "We helped connect the dots," he says, "and demonstrated that it would be good for the health of the people and the state to decrease emissions (from coal-fired electricity) and bring more green energy into our grid."

Doing It Better

As these examples illustrate, if energy news is to engage and inform the decisions of politicians, industry executives, and the public, the media must think more strategically about what they cover, how they cover it, and which reporters they assign to cover it.

First and foremost, news outlets must expand energy coverage beyond the business desk where the energy reporter typically resides. A good model for strategic coverage can be found at *The New York Times*. In January the paper created an environment "pod" under editor Erica Goode, which absorbed Matthew Wald, the paper's science and technology reporter, as well as seven other reporters from the foreign, national, metro, and science desks. The *Times*'s energy "cluster" is still at the business desk under the direction of assistant business editor Justin Gillis. But he and Goode coordinate coverage of most energy-related content in the paper, as well as the environment pod's sustainability blog, Dot Earth, and the business section's energy and environment blog, Green Inc.

But even a paper as large as the *Times* does not have the staff and expertise to go it alone. One promising trend is the use of content-sharing agreements between traditional news organizations and specialty outlets to expand the newsroom's energy expertise. The *Times*, for example, publishes a significant number of energy politics and business stories online from Energy & Environment Publishing LLC, a subscription-based service that began as a weekly print newsletter a decade ago and has about forty reporters and editors, bureaus in the U.S. and Europe, and a suite of Web sites, including Greenwire and ClimateWire.

Though it probably makes sense for many outlets to cover energy through their business desks, the dollars-and-cents mindset that tends to infect business-desk coverage can be limiting, and coordination with political, environment, technology, and consumer reporters is a must. A number of reporters interviewed for this story say that such communication often takes place on an informal basis, but that it would behoove editors to take a more active role in coordinating coverage across the newsroom.

Arguably a more significant concern than where the energy coverage is based is the need to bolster the scientific expertise in newsrooms. Given limited resources, reporters who can cover energy and environment, as well as the costs of energy legislation and technological feasibility of meeting its targets, are valuable assets. "If you don't have basic economics and science, then you'll be playing catch up for a long time," says ClimateWire's John Fialka. "Washington is knee-deep in reporters who reduce everything to politics."

But perhaps the most important thing for journalists to bring to this new energy beat is the right mindset. The shift from fossil fuels to clean energy is not a series of isolated stories. It is a national story and a global story. What happens in Texas, for instance, doesn't stay in Texas—it is part of a vast western and U.S. energy problem, and it is intimately connected to what happens in China and India. (Indeed, the international stage is where much of the energy story is currently happening, and that creates different challenges for newsrooms. National papers have stepped up coverage of China and India's energy agendas in anticipation of the United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen this December, where world leaders hope to draft a treaty limiting worldwide greenhouse-gas emissions.)

It is a story, too, that will require patience and perseverance as the social currents surrounding it and political leadership driving it change. The world cannot afford for America to abandon energy reform as it did in the 1980s. "It is one of the most important things that we all need to be covering right now," says the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s David Baker. "And we'll need to stay on top of it for years and years to come." If the Clean Energy and Security Act becomes law—even if its provisions are not as robust as environmentalists would like—the shift from fossil fuels to clean energy will require a profound socioeconomic change that will play out over decades. News outlets will be responsible for analyzing and reporting its impact on everyone and everything from ExxonMobil to small businesses, from the Department of Energy to the local public utilities commission. At every level, there will be opportunities to investigate whether all the effort is, in fact, creating jobs, promoting energy security, and protecting the environment.

Energy is the quintessential twenty-first-century story, and covering it well will require newsrooms to think strategically and creatively about how to use the resources available to them, both within and beyond their newsrooms. **CJR**

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How 'Subprime' Killed 'Predatory'

And what it tells us about language, business journalism, and the way we think about the economic crisis

BY ELINORE LONGOBARDI

What is the root cause of the financial crisis? "Lousy loans," says Elizabeth Warren, the chairwoman of the Congressional Oversight Panel. We agree. And we like the phrase, especially because it provides a nice counterweight to that other double-L phrase, "liar loans," which tends to blame the borrower. Warren's phrase is a casual one, of course, but in some ways it is better than the language the press has tended to use to characterize the origins

of the crisis. The fact is, of all the possible terms to describe these lousy loans, the press never found the right one. And as we'll see, the lack of a single word—one easy-to-understand adjective to put in front of the word "loans" or "lending," a word that would encapsulate the boiler-room culture that overran the mortgage industry—cost all of us plenty.

Instead of the right word, the press deployed another word—"subprime"—for reasons that are to some extent understandable, but unfortunate nonetheless. Unfortunate because "subprime" describes only the borrower, in unflattering terms, and has nothing to say about the lender.

That brings us to a secondary phrase: the less common but far more interesting "predatory lending." Interesting because it both gets us closer to the heart of the problem, putting the focus on the lender, and yet still falls tragically short. Its rhetorical punch has given it staying power but has also hindered its broader acceptance by the press—leaving

space for "subprime" to slip into ever more common usage and eventually to dominate the discourse.

Why is this crucial? Because when large segments of the business press dismissed the term "predatory lending," they also dismissed the practice. The press had trouble understanding the crisis because it didn't know how to talk—and thus how to think—about it.

Is this a tragedy? Well, we've got the numbers, we've read the stories behind them, and we promise to back up our claim that when "subprime" muscled aside "predatory" it had real-world consequences. But first we want to broaden this discussion a bit.

One

More than twenty-five years ago, scholar Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, an important book about the rise of nationalism, described nations as being bound together by a perception of solidarity on the part of their citizens. Media were key to the formation of this solidarity. The press helps both to generate a sense that we are part of a larger whole and to define the nature of that whole. That's relevant for our purposes because it relates journalistic language—the stories we tell ourselves—to how society is ordered. As Michael Schudson wrote in the *American Historical Review* in 2002: "Anderson's work potentially promotes...a recognition that news is not only the raw material for rational public discourse but also the public construction of particular images of self, community, and nation."

With that in mind, we ask: What kind of imagined community has the press, particularly the business press, fostered?

We can start to answer that question by looking at how "subprime" came to trounce "predatory." The fluctuating place of "predatory lending" and the rise of "subprime" in the U.S. press lexicon is an indication of underlying attitudes about the relationship between business and consumer, and thus about class, race, and so much else.

We used the news database Factiva, which has its unfortunate quirks but is still useful as an indicator of general trends, to give us a rough quantitative lay of the linguistic landscape over the past two decades. Using the graph on page 47, you can see that the phrase "predatory lending" had a slow start in the press, with collective use by a broad spectrum of "major news and business publications" remaining in the single or double digits each year through the 1990s. Usage increased in the 2000s, rising from three

or four hundred in the first two years of the decade to seven hundred or so in each of the next two years (as state attorneys general, who used the term a lot, waged a campaign against unscrupulous lenders around the nation), then falling back to the four hundreds or below each year from 2004 through 2006 (when the Bush administration came down hard on those AGs at the behest of the banking industry, even as the worst kinds of predatory loans flourished). Then in 2007 usage spiked at more than a thousand instances, along with widespread recognition of the financial crisis. But it falls back down to the seven hundreds in 2008 and continues down to fewer than three hundred for the first half of this year.

It's important to keep in mind that the dip in the press's use of the term "predatory lending" that began in 2004 coincides almost exactly with a tremendous spike—a veritable onslaught—of actual predatory lending in the real world. This is part of the heartbreaking press failure in this economic crisis that we have documented previously (see "Power Problem," *CJR*, May/June 2009).

By contrast, "subprime" started late but took off fast, with hits reaching more than seven hundred in 1998, according to Factiva, when the market enjoyed an early boomlet (along with some pushback from the government that we'll get to in a minute). While "subprime" generally mirrored the track of "predatory" for the first few years of the current decade—if on a slightly larger scale—it began to diverge mid-decade and then shot up tremendously, to more than 75,000 by 2007, when it peaked with the onset of the current crisis. That year, and continuing through 2008, hits for "subprime" were on the order of seventy or eighty times more frequent than hits for "predatory lending."

Predatory lending is a subset of the subprime market, and so one might argue that we shouldn't expect "predatory" to be used as often as "subprime." But not as often is one thing, and eighty times less is quite another. Also, such an argument ignores the fact that the problem here—and thus the news—is the *predatory* aspect of subprime. Anyone who didn't understand that didn't understand the story.

As the press should have known, but apparently didn't, the subprime industry has always been in large part the domain of sleazebags and became only more so over time. The problem, as consumer advocates long argued, mostly in vain, was not that higher-risk borrowers were getting loans, but that they were getting *bad* loans. So not only did the shift to the word "subprime" remove all reference to aggressor and victim—professional and civilian, con man and conned—it stigmatized an entire community of borrowers. To the extent that subprime comes to be seen as bad, subprime *borrowers* are bad. Lenders? Just doing their job.

Thus the significance of this linguistic shift is major. Here's the thing: the roots of the current crisis lie in the disastrous expansion of the subprime market, which ballooned in the 1990s and 2000s—thanks, in large part, to Wall Street, which was looking for more mortgage-backed securities to stoke a blazing market, and to corrosive deregulation. Though it makes little sense, a recurring press mantra has it that borrowers, as much as anyone else, are to blame. But blaming

borrowers in a *systemic* way ignores the structure of the subprime market and the extent to which lenders had power and borrowers did not.

Two

There is a mitigating factor here: the phrase "predatory lending" has its own problems. Such rhetorical aggression is always a gamble, because while it drives its point solidly home it also invites responses ranging from skepticism to outright attack. (Except from true believers, of course, but they aren't the ones who need convincing.) So while we don't have a problem with fighting words, the fact is that such words—even, and this is key, when those words are highly defensible—only stand up with solid definitions behind them. And no one can agree on precisely what predatory lending is.

This combination of a lack of clarity and rhetorical heat meant that much of the press—and especially the business press, which tended to underplay consumer issues already—remained uncomfortable with the term, even after years of use, and so ultimately gravitated toward the far more industry-friendly "subprime."

In order to understand this submerging of the term "predatory lending" even as the actual practice escalated, we first need to look at where the term comes from. We are aware of business dictionaries, but we think the business press should be speaking the same language as everyone else, so we rely here on the Oxford English Dictionary to give us a quick etymology of the word "predatory." It is from the Latin *praedatorius*, the adjectival form of *praedator*, which means plunderer. Thus the definition of predatory is "Of, relating to, of the nature of, or involving plunder, pillage, or ruthless exploitation."

Got it.

But the OED includes a sub-definition for the business context. Thus we get this 1912 use of the term, the earliest the dictionary provides, from the *Trenton Evening Times*: "Wrongs done by industrial corporations which are not monopolies...such as...the elimination of competition by unfair or predatory practices."

If we then scan down to the latest example of usage, from 2002, the target of the word is not other businesses but rather consumers. From *Modern Maturity*: "A loan company is considered predatory...when it makes a loan that a borrower can't repay."

Well, kind of. Looking a little deeper, here are Allen Fishbein and Harold Bunce, in a 2001 article about subprime and predatory lending published by the Department of Housing and Urban Development:

The term "predatory lending" is a shorthand term used to encompass a wide range of abuses. Although there is broad public agreement that predatory lending should have no place in the mortgage market, there are differing views about the magnitude of the problem and even how to define practices that make a loan predatory.

Time hasn't clarified much. Researchers writing in *The*

Journal of Consumer Affairs last fall noted that vague and competing definitions of “predatory lending” hamper regulatory activity and efforts to track how often the practice occurs. They tell us:

In order to address predatory lending adequately, there needs to be a differentiation between what constitutes abusive lending, predatory lending, and mortgage fraud. Descriptions of predatory lending are plentiful, but a precise definition that would inform regulators and consumer advocates is non-existent.

In an interview with *CJR*, Lucy Delgadillo, the lead author of the article and an associate professor at Utah State, identified the four traits common to all the definitions of “predatory lending” that she and her colleagues found: 1) It targets vulnerable populations, like the elderly and minorities, who are often poorer and less sophisticated financially; 2) It lends more than the borrower can be expected to repay; 3) It involves conspiratorial activity between, say, appraisers and loan officers; and 4) It involves the intention to steal, through, say, equity stripping.

This makes sense, but we are still left with the fact that the term is broad and slippery enough to have defied a common definition after more than a decade of use in the national media. The fact is that “subprime lending,” better defined and more broadly accepted, was poised for the press to adopt in a way that “predatory lending” was not.

The importance of the term “predatory lending” is its injection of a much-needed moral dimension into the public argument. The press, especially the business press, is often uncomfortable with such an approach. That’s too bad. But there is also the fact that the very complexity of “predatory lending” threatens to render it imprecise to a fault. Which is to say that, frequently, any reader looking to move beyond the definition of “predatory lending” as bad lending—and into the realm of unscrupulous lending—will run into confusion. For example, the kind of lending we are discussing systematically targeted whole communities, but the words themselves give us very little insight into that aspect of the practice. To round out the term “predatory lending” then, we need to consider two important and related terms: “redlining” and “reverse redlining.”

Redlining is the denial of credit in certain, typically urban neighborhoods based on their racial makeup. The term comes out of the Chicago activist community in the late 1960s, according to scholar Amy Hillier, and refers to a practice dating to the 1930s when the Depression-era Home Owners’ Loan Corporation drew up maps that designated these neighborhoods as high-risk investments—and outlined them in red. Following from redlining, a practice by no means dead, is the more recent “reverse redlining,” which indicates an area of enthusiastic bad lending—expensive, deceptive, and heavily marketed—rather than a refusal to lend.

These terms get at the nature of lending “choices” in poor urban areas. The subprime industry, which came of age in the lending vacuum redlining created, is able to target these communities because prime lenders are (still) reluctant to serve

Instances of the terms
“predatory lending”
and “subprime”

75,000

70,000

65,000

60,000

55,000

5,000

4,000

3,000

2,000

1,000

0

1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008

PREDATORY LENDING
SUBPRIME

A rout In the mid-2000s, as the practice of predatory lending was exploding, most of the business press rejected the term “predatory lending” in favor of the industry-friendly “subprime.”

them. And so predatory lending has thrived here (as have foreclosures). You can't understand the practice of predatory lending if you don't understand all of this.

Three

That brings us to the term "subprime," which overwhelmed "predatory" in the middle of the decade as the market exploded and subprime assumed an aura of legitimacy (subprime leader Ameriquest, you'll recall, was the sponsor of the 2005 Super Bowl halftime show and owned not one but two blimps).

Despite the best efforts of consumer advocates to distinguish between predatory practices and good loans to high-risk customers, that distinction was, in reality, collapsing as the subprime industry hit a new low in the mid-2000s. With the rise of such particularly abusive products as 2-28s and 3-27s (a 2-28 loan had a two-year teaser rate that then adjusted every six months for the next twenty-eight years; a 3-27 loan was basically the same thing but with a three-year teaser rate), the subprime industry was now essentially rotten through and through. Both of these loans—and other products that will effectively be banned under new Federal Reserve lending rules and that are also the target of proposed federal legislation—hit their strides in 2005 and 2006, the "boom years for bad subprime," according to Kathleen Day of the Center for Responsible Lending. In other words, "subprime" became the dominant *term* just as predatory lending was becoming the dominant *practice*.

It's also important to remember the degree to which "subprime"—both the word and the industry—received powerful rhetorical support from right-wing political and intellectual elites who pilloried the very concept of predatory lending. Take, for example, former Senator Phil Gramm. We can see his rhetorical strategy in quotes like this one, which appeared in a March 20, 2008, *Wall Street Journal* article: "Don't apologize when you make a loan above the prime rate to someone that has a marginal credit rating," Texas Republican Phil Gramm... told a group of bankers in 2000. "In the name of predatory lending, we could end up denying people with moderate income and limited credit ratings the opportunity to borrow money."

In mid-2000, around the time that HUD and the Treasury Department published a major joint report on the problem of predatory lending, Gramm, then head of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, ordered his own report on "what the regulators refer to as 'predatory lending.'" The slim report's conclusion? It's all about language:

It is difficult to understand how the regulators or Congress can formulate proposals to combat predatory lending when there is no clear understanding as to what it is. A definition of the practice is *sine qua non* [sic] for any progress toward a remedy.

In the absence of a definition, not only might we miss the target, but we may hit the wrong target.

Acknowledging the problem of definitions is one thing. But using it as an excuse for doing nothing is ridiculous. This

illustrates the danger of turning the discussion into a linguistic argument—of working from the *words* back to the *practices*, rather than the other way around.

Gramm, of course, wasn't the only big shot running interference for mortgage lenders and their Wall Street backers. John D. Hawke Jr., then the comptroller of currency charged with overseeing nationally chartered banks, said in a February 2003 news release: "The OCC has no reason to believe that any national bank is engaging in predatory lending." This is the agency that challenged the states, both in and out of court, for trying to protect consumers, and in a 2007 Supreme Court case won the right to supervise national banks without state interference. Except that the industry-funded OCC brought only thirteen consumer-related enforcement actions (out of 495 total) between 2000 and 2006, according to an excellent piece in *Business Week* last fall by Robert Berner and Brian Grow.

But the press did have other "official" voices it could have listened to more carefully. There were even serious warnings from inside the federal government. Some prominent examples: with the subprime market heating up in the late 1990s, the Federal Trade Commission went after predatory lenders, although it had limited power to do so; in an effort to address predatory lending, Congress passed the Home Ownership and Equity Protection Act in 1994, and then the Fed made revisions to the act that took effect in 2002, although both versions lacked real muscle; hearings before a variety of House and Senate committees in the late 1990s and early 2000s demonstrated a growing awareness of problems in the lending industry, as did a handful of attempts by some enlightened lawmakers to pass additional regulations. These efforts fell far short, but for anyone paying attention they shed quite a bit of light on the problems that would soon lead to disaster.

There also was that important 2000 study from HUD and the Treasury, called "Curbing Predatory Home Mortgage Lending," which warned of "widespread predatory practices in the subprime market," and went on to describe both the problems and possible remedies for more than a hundred pages. Not to mention a lengthy 2004 GAO study, titled "Consumer Protection: Federal and State Agencies Face Challenges in Combating Predatory Lending," which urged greater regulation and enforcement of "consumer protection laws applicable to predatory lending."

Notice how little problem these reports have using the term "predatory lending." And if you read them, you will see how strong their authors' concern was. It seems that, problems in terminology aside, those who took the *words* seriously took the *practice* seriously as well.

Four

This crisis without a name was always going to be difficult to cover—particularly given the rhetorical counteroffensive from the financial services industry and its backers among the political and intellectual elite. The story needed time and space, and, it must be said, journalistic vision and courage, all of which were lacking during the most critical years.

For proof, we circle back to the past two decades of news coverage. With the exception of a stray piece from *The Financial Times* in January 1983, the first Factiva hits for the phrase “predatory lending” come in the early 1990s from *The Boston Globe* and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, as well as from a handful of other local papers. The *Globe* was covering Rhode Island-based Fleet, which was then the target of predatory lending accusations in Massachusetts. The *Journal-Constitution* got involved when a series of lawsuits filed by Georgia borrowers charged that Atlanta-based Fleet Finance, which was also the target of an investigation by the Georgia attorney general’s office, had victimized residents of low-income black neighborhoods.

Both the *Globe* and the *Journal-Constitution*—like other local and regional papers—produced some excellent work once the story landed in their backyards. One example is the AJC’s superb October 1992 piece by Jill Vejnaska, which carried the headline **LENDERS PREY ON UNWARY**; or an editorial that same month that told us how “deregulation has spawned a lending undercurrent resembling a cesspool.”

By 1993, the Georgia story had gained national attention, and it is interesting to see how the national press began to define predatory lending. Here is Reuters, on December 16, 1993: “Predatory lending takes place when a bank deliberately lends funds to people who would not normally qualify for such loans to foreclose on their properties and sell them at a profit.” That definition echoed one in the November 19 *Wall Street Journal*: “Under predatory lending, a bank knowingly lends money to people who it knows don’t qualify for loans, in order to foreclose on them later and sell the property at a profit.”

These are damning definitions. Their strength is that they clearly describe intent, and they call to mind the conspiratorial aspects of corruption in lending—an important component that was absent from most later uses of the term. By contrast, the vast majority of stories in the 1990s that mention “subprime” were market- or investor-oriented. The more a news outlet focused on the worsening position of borrowers—which turns out to be the angle closest to the truth—the more likely it was to use “predatory lending.”

The start of the new millennium brought rising concern over predatory lending practices, and the press reflected this concern. As the numbers in our graph indicate, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, the *Journal*, and other outlets turned in strong performances from 2000 through 2003—years that featured aggressive regulatory action against Citigroup, First Alliance, Household International, and other rogue lenders. Not only state attorneys general but also state legislatures were important actors during these years, with North Carolina adopting the first state predatory lending law in 1999 and a wave of other states following its lead.

But 2004 marked the beginning of a lapse in attention to the issue by the national press that came at exactly the wrong time. The ascendancy of a pro-industry, deregulatory ideology crushed the anti-predatory-lending efforts, and also cleared the way for “subprime” to win the rhetorical day. Crucially, this is the year that the OCC implemented rules

exempting national banks from state consumer protection laws. When it mattered most, the press took its cues from those in power.

Five

What did the run-up to the domination of “subprime” look like in the press? Here is a sample of some typical stories from *The Wall Street Journal* during those crucial years, 2004 through 2006. Keep in mind that this is when the worst predatory loans were flourishing.

In August 2005: **WHITHER SUBPRIME MORTGAGE LENDERS? ANSWER HOLDS HOUSING MARKET CLUES**. Can you imagine a headline that read, **WHITHER PREDATORY MORTGAGE LENDERS?** But here, and more generally, subprime is treated as a business like any other. Sure, we get warnings. But the question is not, “Are these companies regularly deceiving and exploiting consumers?” It is, “Are these stocks good buys?”

In August 2006: **SUBPRIME-LENDING FIELD OPENS UP—AS AMERIQUEST RESTRUCTURES, NEW CENTURY, OTHERS JUMP FOR LARGER SHARE OF MARKET**. Again, substitute “predatory” for “subprime” and you get an entirely different tone.

In December 2006: **MORTGAGE SECTOR WITHSTANDS SUBPRIME’S FALLOUT—DERIVATIVE INDEX ABSORBS MOST OF THE BLOW SO FAR FROM TWO LENDERS’ FAILURES**. Like its subject, this piece raises warnings about subprime and then largely assuages them. “The sky,” one trader tells us, “is not falling.”

The problem, of course, is that the sky was falling. The financial press had a hard time recognizing that fact because it didn’t understand what was happening to borrowers. The fact is, the *Journal* and others in the business press lost sight of the plight of borrowers on an institutional scale. And when the press dropped borrowers, it not only left them even more vulnerable, but it also lost the ability to see what was about to land before it was too late to do anything about it. This is not just a matter of using the relatively neutral, industry-oriented “subprime lending” instead of “predatory lending.” It is a matter of worldview. The press didn’t understand the danger predatory lending posed to whole communities, or the danger it posed to the financial system. In other words, the “imagined community” that the business press created in the years leading up to the crisis was imaginary in more ways than Benedict Anderson meant when he coined the phrase. When the business press lost track of the plight of borrowers, it lost track of reality.

Anderson is instructive in another way. He suggests that people read newspapers very much the way they read novels, following the narrative of particular stories. In this framework, the problem is that, having relegated the main plot to subtext, the press wrote a bad novel about the financial crisis. In the mid-2000s, the press sufficiently buried both the term and the idea of predatory lending so that the reader might in fact have wondered whether it was still part of the story. And yes, that is a tragedy. **CJR**

ELINORE LONGOBARDI is a staff writer for *The Audit*, the online business desk of the Columbia Journalism Review.



Ideas + Reviews

SECOND READ

Of Heroes and Humans

Jim Brosnan wrote about himself, and sports writing evolved

BY MICHAEL SHAPIRO

Red Smith, who wrote as well as anyone about athletes and the games they play, called the sports section the "toy department," and it is hard to know whether he meant this as a statement of defiance or of self-abnegation. Sports writing has long been regarded as the journalistic equivalent of the beautiful person who just doesn't add much to dinner-party chitchat. ("But he/she really is smart.") There is some justification for this. Sports are games, even as those who write about them have traditionally worked hard to cast what takes place on the field of play as a mortal struggle, rife with agony, tragedy, valor, and in recent years, the brave doings of "warriors." Warriors, however, are people who fight in wars, experiences that no amount of hard sliding or diving after loose balls can approximate.

For a long time, writing about sports meant chronicling the feats of heroes, with little to no thought of trying to make sense of the men—and on very rare occasions, women—behind them. The writers traveled with athletes, played cards, drank, chatted in hotel lobbies, and turned the other way when a woman other than a player's wife picked up his room key. What mattered took place on the field, or in the arena. And when those events were thrilling, they often brought out the best in the sports writer's deep bag of prose.

Like so much in twentieth-century American life, things rumbled along this way until World War II. It would be an exaggeration to say that all hell broke loose after 1945. But it was as if the experiences of war, or writing about war, had a bracing effect that made it difficult for the men who had seen a thing or two to return to the old ways. So it was that beginning in the late 1940s, writing about sports slowly began to assume a new, and in some circles, dark edge. Questions were asked that had not been asked before, especially in the clubhouse, by such tough-guy practitioners as Dick Young of the *New York Daily News*. Young hunted for gossip and innuendo and, belly to belly, asked how a man could hang a curve on an 0-2 count, and for this the athletes hated him. Meanwhile, others were asking questions of a far more nuanced sort, which typically revolved around the word "why?" (Such questions lead, inevitably, to the bigger question of "Who are you?") Still, such pioneering magazine writers as the wonderful W.C. Heinz labored in relative loneliness. Celebration remained the watchword of the press box, which meant that the most probing questions remained unasked.

It was in this slowly evolving terrain that there appeared in the spring of 1960 a book unlike any the sports world had ever seen. It was called *The Long Season*. Its author was Jim Brosnan. Brosnan was thirty years old and in the sixth season

of his major-league pitching career. He wore glasses, chewed tobacco, listened to George Shearing, read D.H. Lawrence, relished foreign-language films like *Nights of Cabiria*, did not require a special occasion to enjoy a martini or three, loved his wife, and had earned a reputation as a pitcher with a good fastball who thought too much on the mound. The world knew this because Brosnan had written about it—by himself, without the assistance of a ghost-writer or an as-told-to buddy.

Nobody—let alone a ballplayer—had ever taken readers inside the clubhouse, and on the road, and into the bullpen, and given them the chance to watch and listen. *The Long Season* opens in the spring and ends on the season's final day. In between, Brosnan carps about his manager, throws too many home-run balls, gets traded, wonders why he is traded even though he's happy to be playing for a new club, and spends a lot of time chatting with his fellow pitchers about money, as well as the eternal mystery of what it takes to get a batter out. If his pitching didn't make Brosnan famous, his writing certainly did. *The Long Season*

men eager for their thoughts, when someone asked Brosnan, "What was the book about?"

The question suggested that a year after its publication, there might be a new spin on the widely accepted view that the book was about playing baseball for a living. But Brosnan did not get the chance to answer because Hutchinson, not known as a literary sort, did it for him.

"The book," he replied, "is about him."

With that Hutchinson rose and walked away, looking to Brosnan like a man well pleased with himself.

But was he right?

"Hutch," Brosnan told me in a recent conversation, "was never wrong."

If this was so, then Hutchinson had seen what the others had not, that in writing a book about himself, Brosnan had propelled the evolution of sports writing a great step forward by introducing the heretofore largely unimagined idea that a real-life athlete might be a character worthy of literature. Brosnan smiles at the thought of this, slyly, as if to say that well, yes, that was the point all along.

the ear and the mind that was open to something new."

That something new was writing. A priest in parochial school had encouraged him to pursue the craft, telling him that he had a spark of talent, but would need to hone it through practice. So Brosnan practiced. He wrote letters and kept a diary. And when he at last made it to the big leagues with the Cubs in 1954, he found off-season work at a Chicago ad agency, for which he wrote copious memos. He traveled with a typewriter. He did not think well of many of the sports writers, whose knowledge of the game he found lacking. But he did strike up a friendship with Robert Boyle of *Sports Illustrated*, who, over lunch one day in the spring of 1958, suggested that if something interesting happened, Brosnan should try his hand at writing it up. A week later the Cubs traded him to the Cardinals. Suddenly Brosnan had, in addition to a very unhappy wife, material.

His first piece appeared in *SI* that July, and was a precursor of bigger things to come, filled with wry observations and generous dollops of self-deprecation. Brosnan also had a caution for readers who might envy his life: the days are long and filled with peril, and your wife will wish you delivered mail for a living.

Boyle not only invited him to write more for the magazine, but introduced him to an editor at Harper & Brothers, who suggested that if Brosnan were interested in writing a book about his life in the big leagues, he should send along forty pages. No promises, but the editor would have a look. That he did, and then asked for another forty pages, and another. All through the spring and summer of 1959, Brosnan pitched and wrote and sent his pages, not at all concerned that he was operating without a contract or an advance. "Jesus, I was a pretty lucky guy," he says. "These guys who are in the business and are good at it [thought] I could do the same thing."

He wrote with an ease that stood in sharp contrast to his disposition on the mound. There he sweated, winced, and berated himself. "That wasn't a very good pitch, buddy boy.... Next time we'll curve him, right?" The mound, not

Nobody—let alone a ballplayer—had ever taken readers inside the clubhouse, and on the road, and into the bullpen, and given them a chance to watch and listen.

irked some in his exclusive fraternity—fellow ballplayers called him a "gray flannel suiter" and a "beatnik." But critics were kind, and the readers made it a best-seller.

The novelty of *The Long Season*, however, obscured something deeper. This did not escape the attention of Brosnan's manager in Cincinnati, Fred Hutchinson, who was a man of few words, all of them trenchant. In 1961, the Reds had just clinched their first National League pennant in twenty-one years. Brosnan and Hutchinson were surrounded in the happy clubhouse by a gaggle of news-

HE IS NOW SEVENTY-NINE YEARS OLD and lives in the Chicago suburb of Morton Grove, in the same split-level home to which, in the course of *The Long Season*, he returned to play with his children and seek the solace of his wise and peppery wife, Anne Stewart, who called him (and still calls him) "Meat." He had grown up in Cincinnati a suspicious reader, which is to say that he read a lot but with a skeptical eye, especially when it came to books about baseball, which often bore no relation to what he was experiencing on the field.

"They didn't feel right," he says. "I had

the page, was where he needed to prove himself, which afforded him an enviable freedom from literary angst, though not from struggle.

Other ballplayers had by then chronicled their troubles. But these were stories of cruel circumstances: Roy Campanella's paralysis in *It's Good to Be Alive* and Jimmy Piersall's psychotic breakdown in *Fear Strikes Out*. Brosnan's trouble was Brosnan, and not merely with his difficulty in spotting his fastball. *The Long Season* may be an easy and engaging read, with its behind-the-scenes glimpses of flipping rocks onto the field to pass the early innings in the bullpen. Yet there is also an unmistakable edge to the book, the mark of an author using his material to sort himself out.

In retrospect, Brosnan is quick to concede the point. As it happened, he grew up buffeted between two warring parents, each of whom had different dreams for him: his mother wanted him to be a doctor, his father wanted him to play ball. He grew to be an angry fellow and found no comfort in months of psychoanalysis—an unthinkable recourse for a ballplayer—while he was still with the Cubs. But writing was a way to try to make sense of things.

He did this deftly. *The Long Season* opens with the sun shining, but not for Brosnan, who is unsure of his place on his team, the Cardinals, or with his new manager, Solly Hemus. The author cannot abide him, and makes liberal use of Hemus as the catch basin for his fears, his resentments, his inability to throw the pitches that others can. He views springtime as a season of harsh trials for every man trying to make the club, which means, inevitably, a season of broken dreams and farewells.

Brosnan presents himself as a man for whom contentment is elusive. It is not surprising, then, that the strongest set piece in the book tells of a pitcher facing the end of the line. Sal Maglie had been one of the finest pitchers of his time—but at forty-one, his time was well past. He wanted one more season, and Brosnan wanted it for him.

"Sal Maglie," he wrote, "has gone down the drain."

There is Maglie on the mound, laboring. His back hurts. He cannot find a rhythm or his curve.

There is an unmistakable edge to *The Long Season*, the mark of an author using his material to sort himself out. For Brosnan, writing was a way to try to make sense of things.

When a pitcher starts doubting his own stuff, he prays for an easy inning. He needs one.

There was no easy inning left for Sal.

Maglie loads the bases.

"Make that good pitch here, now," I said to myself.

He didn't make it. Maybe he couldn't do it.... Will he ever pitch anything but batting practice, any more?

Brosnan will make the club, not as a starter but as a reliever. He understands how precarious his position is; he is a bad outing away from being reduced to mop-up work. The season is about to begin, and he is filled with worry that he can share only with his wife. So he writes her a letter to "let the sight of words console my nerves":

If I start to give up runs now, I'm a bum again. Success breeds a maggotty fortune that needs constant replenishment and refurbishing....

If the knives start to jab they may hit this heel if it's left carelessly unprotected.... Let's face it, I can be had. The black forces of despair have made it with me before!

But having hit bottom, he turns to her, and to the life they share:

You'll have your sorrowful, pining days as before, waiting behind, never any more sure than I am that I can do it.... But this man's ready to start a new season, and we're the team that can take it all.... You and I.

He cannot seem to find his place—on the mound, or with the team. Success comes fleetingly, and by early June he

is convinced he is about to be traded. The news that he will make a rare start in Philadelphia brings no joy, only conspiratorial rage: he is sure that Hemus wants to give the Phillies a peek, hoping they might take Brosnan off his hands. "By the time I reached Connie Mack Stadium I had talked myself into a depressing cynicism," he wrote. "Warming up before the game I didn't feel right. Just hot under the collar.

"Ashburn led off for Philly. 'I'll curve him,' I thought. Ashburn looked at four curve balls and walked."

He records an out. And then he starts to fall apart:

Freese hit third. 'I got to keep the ball down,' I thought. Freese hit a high slider into the upper deck of the left field stands. The Philly fans started to laugh, again. (Those miserable fans.)

He is back in St. Louis the next night, and takes his wife and children to dinner at the restaurant owned by the team's greatest player, Stan Musial. Never does the gulf between star and journeyman feel so profound. The Brosnans are seated near the kitchen and watch as Musial works the room, autographing a dozen menus. He stops by their table, buys them a drink, and lingers long enough to tell Brosnan that business is so good he might invest in another bank, his third. "Now there's a celebrity," Brosnan's wife tells him. The letter advising him that he has been traded to Cincinnati is waiting at the front desk when they return.

The news disappoints Anne Stewart Brosnan—the summer heat, the impossibly long drive with two young children from Chicago. But for her husband, the letter brings the relief and possibility of a fresh start. The Reds, a struggling team like the Cardinals, make him feel wanted. In the weeks to come, his pitching im-

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proves. The Reds fire their manager and replace him with Hutchinson, who had first managed Brosnan in St. Louis and whom he admires.

The trade comes at the midway point of the season, and once the deal is complete, the book evolves into a different sort of story. The anger ebbs. In its place comes room for questions and, with them, some knowledge. On a trip to St. Louis, Brosnan seeks out the Cardinal general manager, Bing Devine. As happy as he is to be with the Reds, he cannot help but wonder why St. Louis wanted to be rid of him. Devine replies with careful platitudes. Brosnan presses him ("Do you feel that I let you down, Bing?"), but Devine will not rise to the bait. Sensing he will get no further, Brosnan takes his leave, picks up his final Cardinals check, and finds a letter from a fan telling him that "Devine was a louse, Hemus was a bum, and I was still all right."

The Reds make a run at the first division—and a modest share of World Series money. In September, they arrive in San Francisco to play the Giants, whose best hitters have had their way with Brosnan before. Not today. Suddenly, in the course of an at-bat by Willie Kirkland, who had homered six times against him, Brosnan rediscovers his purposeful dark side—a necessary tool for success on the mound—and strikes him out with a fastball under the chin.

"When a pitcher can rid himself of the feeling that he can't get a certain hitter out, he *knows* he's got good stuff," we read. "The Giants stared at me for six innings, waiting to see Old Broz, Old Nervous Broz, start to waver, start to think on the mound. They waited in vain."

The Reds ultimately tumble to a sixth-place finish, three games ahead of the Cardinals. But with the end of the season, Brosnan's thoughts turned away from vengeance, from being traded, from Sunday double-headers sweating through flannel uniforms, from hangovers and pep pills in the clubhouse. They turn, instead, to the end of things. "The empty locker symbolizes the cold, blue sadness of the last day of the season," he writes. "There is something poignant and depressing about clearing out, for good; abandoning your own place in the clubhouse.

They even take your name plate down, and who's to know what player dressed in which locker?"

IT DID NOT TAKE LONG FOR OTHERS to follow where Brosnan had first gone, and within a decade the deceptively easy tone of *The Long Season* would be eclipsed by such tell-alls as Jim Bouton's tart and bawdy *Ball Four*. In fact, the idea of the athlete as subject matter became so accepted that, in time, it was hard to imagine a spring publishing season without the advent of another *Bronx Zoo* or *Juiced* or, most recently, *A-Rod*. For that matter, it was hard to envision a magazine staking a claim to literary greatness without being able to boast such gems as Gay Talese on Joe DiMaggio, Roger Angell on Bob Gibson, or Richard Ben Cramer on Ted Williams.

It feels like a stretch to suggest that *The Long Season* changed sports writing. The book appeared just as journalism was reinventing itself, expanding what it defined as a story and how to tell it. But in the mad race for style points that began in the 1960s, and which today includes high marks for snarkiness and innuendo, something was lost: the simpler and ultimately more universal brand of storytelling that a most unlikely author had to offer.

Brosnan was back on the mound and better in 1960, and better still in 1961, when he wrote his second book, *Pennant Race*. It is a good book, and though it reads very much like *The Long Season*, Brosnan concedes that it lacks the original's power: it is the work of a more contented man. He would go on to write several more books and hundreds of magazine articles, and that is how he made his living when his time came to walk away from the game. He tried his hand at fiction, but was never really pleased with the results.

"I have three kids," he says, "and a half a novel about each of them."

Like pitching with a three-run lead, it only *looks* easy. **CJR**

MICHAEL SHAPIRO, a contributing editor to CJR, teaches at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. His most recent book is *Bottom of the Ninth: Branch Rickey, Casey Stengel, and the Daring Scheme to Save Baseball From Itself*.

Rocket Man

An epic tale of men, missiles, and bureaucratic maneuvering

BY RYAN GRIM

HUMANITY IS NOW SOME SIXTY YEARS into the nuclear age and has, somehow, yet to extinguish itself. How that somehow came to be is the question that drives Neil Sheehan's new book, *A Fiery Peace in a Cold War: Bernard Schriever and the Ultimate Weapon*.

Sheehan has written the best kind of biography, one that tells history through a central character. While Bernard "Ben-nie" Schriever is a compelling man—an independent-minded Air Force officer who foresaw and then built the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM)—the real story is of the bureaucratic hand-to-hand combat that led to that missile finally taking flight. Of course, crafting an engrossing five-hundred-page account of a bureaucratic tussle is no easy task. Yet Sheehan makes it work, employing some of the same depth of reporting and detailed storytelling that made a hit of his Vietnam epic, *A Bright Shining Lie*.

There are enough books on the atomic race—which turned out to be a two-country competition, the Nazis having given up early—to fill a bomb shelter top to bottom. The race to make the device that could deliver that bomb has been relatively ignored. This is surprising. For unlike the nuclear derby, this was a real competition, which began with the Soviets in the lead.

The budding military-industrial complex plays the role of antagonist in Sheehan's tale, flatly unable to make a working ICBM but unwilling to let an upstart company edge its way in. Schriever, in pursuing the missile, takes on the top ranks of that complex, from generals to the former-generals-turned-CEOs and the senators they bankroll.

The ICBM became feasible only when American scientists learned they would be able to make an extremely powerful hydrogen bomb weighing less than a ton by the late 1950s. Its explosive range would allow it to miss its target by a wide margin but still achieve its destructive purpose; its relatively light weight would allow it to be placed on the tip of a rocket and fired from thousands of miles away.

As Schriever saw it, the advance of anti-aircraft technology would soon prevent American bombers from reaching their targets in the Soviet Union. Perhaps just as soon, the Soviets would have a missile capable of hitting American cities in thirty minutes, with only fifteen minutes of advance warning. Left with no deterrent, the U.S. would be subject to either annihilation or nuclear blackmail. Conversely,

if the U.S. produced a battery of ICBMs, Soviet destruction would be assured in the event of a Russian attack.

Such weapons, Schriever argued in a 1955 briefing to the RAND Corporation, would have the "highest probability of Not [sic] being used." Since the Soviets would be "unlikely to miscalculate our capability to retaliate," they would be kept in check. Indeed, if both nations possessed ICBMs, mutual destruction was assured—thus forging, through fear, the "fiery peace" of Sheehan's title.

Schriever's first bureaucratic knife fight was one that, by rights, should have left him bleeding out in an alley. His foe was the ferocious Curtis LeMay. During the firebombing attacks on Japan in March 1945, the iconic general had wanted to torch the country himself, Sheehan reports. He was denied the mission only because he had recently been briefed on the atomic bomb, and there was some fear that he might be shot down, tortured, and then reveal nuclear secrets.

Having crossed this moral threshold during World War II, LeMay was indifferent to the number of civilians (estimated in the tens of millions) who would die in a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union. Nor did he realize that such an attack would kick nuclear dust into the atmosphere, bring about a nuclear winter in the Northern hemisphere, and effectively end life as we know it. For LeMay, the atomic bomb was merely a more efficient means of slaughter. It wasn't something new entirely and it certainly didn't need to be delivered by a missile. What, then, would be the point of the Air Force?

LeMay wanted it done, as it had always been, by his bombers. Schriever, ranking well beneath the legendary general, had already concluded that Soviet anti-aircraft technology would render LeMay's bomber squadrons impotent. It was a prediction confirmed by the 1960 downing of a U-2 spy plane flying above sixty thousand feet, a height LeMay insisted would always be safe.

Convinced throughout the 1950s that the answer was simply to make better bombers, LeMay called on the defense industry to build faster planes that could fly at higher altitudes, repeatedly overruling Schriever. The friction took a toll on both men. At one point, fed up with his dogged underling, LeMay assigned

A Fiery Peace in a Cold War: Bernard Schriever and the Ultimate Weapon

By Neil Sheehan
Random House
560 pages, \$32

him to South Korea. Luckily, Schriever managed to get the orders rescinded.

Sheehan has divided the biography into seven "books"—much as he did with *Shining Lie*. The first book covers Schriever's experience of World War II and his singular logistical achievements. It also recounts one of the clever ways he moved through the ranks: Schriever was an amateur golfer before the war (reporters gave him the nickname "Bennie") and aging officers were always happy to take him out on the links, where he worked his way into their good graces.

Schriever was lucky. As an officer on the way up when the war began, he quickly rose to command thousands of men. He was also skilled. Logistics, in the end, won World War II, and Schriever's accomplishments are the kind that victory was built on. Studying his climb through the ranks gives hope that the military bureaucracy is, once in a while, capable of promoting its most talented officers and getting the best out of them.

Schriever was swiftly recognized for his logistical genius and pulled from bomber duty, where he had already been decorated for bravery. As the island-hopping Americans worked their way toward the Japanese mainland, Schriever fought his own private battles with his superiors, ensuring, among other things, that the troops had enough toilets and fuel.

In wartime, these bureaucratic battles were life-or-death. In the postwar world, they were *still* life-or-death—but in an abstract way, more difficult to explain to outsiders. Bureaucratic wrangling, in Sheehan's tale, is war by other means.

Schriever, meanwhile, didn't just oversee the construction of the ICBM—he thought it up. After hearing a Princeton professor give a briefing on the likelihood of a hydrogen bomb weighing less than a ton, he immediately conceived the future missile program. Why send a bomber if you can just send the bomb?

His epiphany leads to one of the book's most poignant moral moments. In a waiting room at Princeton, preparing for a meeting with the professor who had delivered the briefing, Schriever sees Albert Einstein walk by. The two swap small talk, and Sheehan wonders what the famous scientist would have

thought if he had known he was shaking the hand of a man doing the diametric opposite of what Einstein thought was right. (After the war, Einstein had grave regrets about his decision to back the creation of the atomic bomb.)

A good idea and a bus ticket, however, will get you to the gates of the Pentagon. Between there and execution stood more than just LeMay, although that speed bump alone was sufficient to drastically slow down the ICBM. There was also the old guard of the defense industry to reckon with. Boeing and the like were just fine at building workable bombers, but had no aerospace skills to speak of. That didn't prevent them from lobbying at the highest levels to get the missile contracts.

It took Schriever years to outmaneuver the complex of interests in his way. He relied on every bureaucratic tool in the book, commissioning reports, stacking blue-ribbon commissions, working backdoor channels to the president, defying outright orders, and playing lots and lots of golf. (For the up-and-coming administrator, Sheehan's volume is quite a primer.)

In one case, a man who would later become his trusted subordinate went far, far beyond the standard bureaucratic shenanigans. As Sheehan recounts, Col. Edward Hall fabricated designs for a Soviet rocket engine and had a friend slip them into intelligence channels as a legitimate report. With good reason, Hall feared that Eisenhower would cut the program's budget in favor of Korean War spending, and wanted to up the ante. He was never caught—but he provided Sheehan with an unpublished memoir in which he confessed the scheme. (Incidentally, Hall's treachery, however patriotic its motivation, seems to have been a familial trait: his brother, Ted Hall, provided the Soviets with key intelligence during the creation of the atomic bomb.)

None of this struggle over the ICBM came to light at the time. Quite the opposite. In the spring of 1957, Bennie graced the cover of *Time*, then at its zenith. Dubbing him "Missileman Schriever," the magazine suggested that team spirit ruled the day at the Pentagon: "The history of the missile has little record of military unwillingness to accept it as the weapon that must be developed at top speed."

Sheehan has corrected the record, and has clearly written a book for the ages—many years and more than a hundred interviews in the making. True, the sheer bulk can be something of an obstacle, just as it was in *Shining Lie*, or David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*. No detail seems to have been left on the cutting-room floor. Each new character is given several pages of background: how he met his wife, how close he crops his hair, etc.

It's a Catch-22. The casual reader simply wants the story to get moving. The detail, though, is crucial, because bureaucratic battles are a clash of personalities and agendas, and a reader unfamiliar with those personalities and those agendas will never understand why one guy won and another lost. (By the way, this book is pretty much all about guys, an unavoidable fact given its time period and subject matter.)

A casual reader, too, might get lost on occasion. Take Sheehan's explanation for the explosion, on the launching pad, of one of the first intermediate-range missiles: "The answer turned out to be not a complicated technological treatise, but once again an explanation as simple as the hot-box metal cupboards on the SAC bombers that had been destroying the vacuum tubes in the navigation and bomb release systems." He's referring to a logistical problem Bennie had worked out about a decade and three hundred pages earlier.

Schriever, we learn, was hardly immune to confusion himself, being obliged to deal with forty-two separate agencies and offices for each step of his program. Eliminating that approval process was one of his many accomplishments—and a typical triumph for a man who was driven to do things differently, to cut through it all. In the end, Sheehan's story is a celebration of that great American icon, the loyal maverick. "Colonel, do you have any experience in test operations?" Schriever asks a man he's interviewing. No, comes the reply. "Do you know anything about testing?" Again, no. "Good," Schriever tells him. "You're my director of tests." **CJR**

RYAN GRIM is the author of *This Is Your Country On Drugs: The Secret History of Getting High in America* and is the senior congressional correspondent for the *Huffington Post*.

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

The News From Ireland: Foreign Correspondents and The Irish Revolution

By Maurice Walsh
I.B. Tauris
258 pages, £20

AT THE END OF WORLD War I, the victorious Allies brought self-determination to Europe, forging whole new nations out of disparate nationalities. The Irish decided that they too were entitled to self-determination, as well as dissolution of the Act of Union that had bound them firmly to Britain for more than a century. They began a shadowy resistance that came to be recognized as a revolution. The British government under Lloyd George was inclined to crush it in the good old imperial way, but failed. Just how journalism contributed to that failure is the subject of Maurice Walsh's study. He sees newspaper and magazine correspondents not as bystanders but as an active force in creating the climate that brought London to the negotiating table. He describes how even journalists from the British establishment papers, stung by accusations that they had become government propagandists during the Great War, now flaunted their independence by laying bare the brutal reprisals of the Royal Irish Constabulary and the infamous Black and Tans. Foreign reporters, notably Americans, also contributed. Walsh takes note of the literary journalist Francis



Hackett, an Irish emigrant to America who stated the Irish case in the pages of *The New Republic*. The author also recounts the advocacy of Carl W. Ackerman, correspondent for the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* (and later the first dean of Columbia University's journalism school). Even at the age of thirty, Ackerman seems to have felt hemmed in by the humble role of reporter, and got himself involved as a mediator of sorts between Sinn Féin leaders and the British government, apparently without notifying his newspaper. (Walsh coldly concludes that Ackerman was more a tool of his British contacts than a genuine go-between.) In any case, there was an eventual settlement, which created the Irish Free State out of 26 of Ireland's 32 counties: a partition that spawned a subsequent civil war and continues to reverberate into the twenty-first century. Walsh, a distinguished correspondent and scholar, has made a first-rate contribution to the history of "the Troubles," in which journalists are not merely recorders but actors.

Cleveland Amory: Media Curmudgeon & Animal Rights Crusader

By Marilyn Greenwald
University Press of New England
252 pages, \$27.95

THE YOUTHFUL YEARS OF Cleveland Amory (1917–1998) were charmed. Born into a good Bostonian family ("a good family is one that used to be better," he wrote in his first book), he took a familiar route through Milton Academy and Harvard ('39, president of *The Crimson*). Then he became the youngest editor at the starchy *Saturday Evening Post*, thanks in part to a letter of recommendation from Katharine Hepburn's mother, a family friend. At twenty-nine, he wrote his first book, *The Proper Bostonians*, a witty look at the Brahmin culture that John P. Marquand had fictionalized in *The Late George Apley*. It sold well, as did two more books on the upper crust. So far, so good—but then things stopped going so well, for a specific reason. Although he found work as a columnist at *Saturday Review* and *TV Guide* (hence "media curmudgeon"), Amory soon made it clear that what lay closest to his heart was his revulsion, born of a

childhood reading of *Black Beauty*, at the ill-treatment of animals, domestic and wild. Before too many years had passed, Amory the social historian and critic-at-large gave way to the animal-rights advocate. In this guise he was outstandingly visible, not only because he could state his case with verve, but because he could call on a wide circle of celebrity acquaintances for support. His outspokenness made him less than universally beloved—the *Today* program fired him for ridiculing a Southern rabbit slaughter—and he finally came to be regarded as something of a monomaniac. Amory founded the Fund for Animals, took part in daring animal-rescue missions, and founded a ranch in east Texas for refugee animals. His last three books were memoirs revolving around a stray cat that Amory had adopted—or vice-versa. Marilyn Greenwald, who earlier wrote an acute biography of the *New York Times* society reporter and editor Charlotte Curtis, seems a little baffled as to what to make of her subject's long and twisting road. Her solution, in the end, is to ignore his literary and journalistic career in favor of his life as a friend of animals. **CJR**

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts—Amherst.

Raising Keynes

A new book paints the iconic economist as the ultimate realist

BY JEFF MADRICK

HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO BE RIGHT. John Maynard Keynes is "an entertaining economist whose bright but shallow dissertations on finance and political economy, when not taken seriously, always provide a source of innocent merriment to his readers."

The remark above was published in 1933 by David Lloyd George, British prime minister during World War I, who, Keynes strenuously argued, failed the nation by demanding inhumanly harsh treatment of the defeated enemy after the conflict. Keynes supported Lloyd George's later attempts to salvage the Liberal Party, but this apparently did not win him sufficient respect from the fading lion.

In fact, Lloyd George's comment reflected the view held by much of the British establishment. Keynes was unorthodox and had been a thorn in the side of the powers that prevailed in England ever since 1919, when he railed against Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Woodrow Wilson. He continued to challenge the conventional wisdom again and again in the 1920s, remained an academic gadfly even when he had become a fellow at King's College, Cambridge, and argued vehemently that government must do more for the unemployed, rid itself of its attachment to gold, and invest aggressively in public works.

Keynes was editor of the most prestigious economics journal of his time. But he was also an active journalist, commenting on public issues mostly for the *Manchester Guardian*, then the most distinguished of Britain's Liberal publications. This was also held against him in serious circles. His journalistic writing, if brilliant in retrospect, and usually right, certainly lacked the hallmark of probity and dullness that merits scholarly credibility. In addition, the cautious U.K. Treasury (which had earlier employed him) was often his target.

Do not feel bad for Keynes, of course. He was from a moderately privileged academic family and had many a door open to him. He did well in the best schools, was hired by the much-admired Treasury in his thirties, became famous well before forty, grew wealthy due to his speculative proclivities in currencies, married a leading Diaghilev ballerina, and was an intimate of Virginia Woolf and others of the Bloomsbury set. By almost any standard he was on top of the world, despite his dubious reputation in the Treasury and established halls of academia.

Keynes: The Rise, Fall, and Return of the Twentieth Century's Most Influential Economist

By Peter Clarke
Bloomsbury
224 pages, \$24

It was crisis that transformed Keynes's relationship to economics and the world's relationship to Keynes. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, he had largely remained a free-market economist. The Great Depression forced him to think more profoundly about how the economy worked. The book he immodestly anticipated would change the world was to be called *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, and he was right. It raised Keynes in terms of influence and respect above any other economist of the century. His reign lasted without serious competition a full generation.

But by the late 1970s, Keynes was the subject of ridicule and widespread dismissal. His great argument, in the American interpretation, was that governments should run deficits to raise economies from recession and assure rapid growth. He was thus firmly identified with government spending, which, thanks to the articulate proselytizing of Milton Friedman and his acolytes, became in the public eye the one certain source of inflation and economic ruin. As inflation soared in the 1970s, Keynes's reputation suffered in the equal and opposite direction. He was not merely eclipsed by Friedman, but made into a relic.

Now crisis has resurrected him again. The world avoided a depression, or something close to it, largely because Keynes was summoned back swiftly and enthusiastically. Indeed, according to many, including even some conservative economists, he was never completely wrong. It is the times that change—and there is wide agreement that Keynes is right for these times.

Peter Clarke, the respected British historian, has written at length in the past on the Keynesian revolution. In light of the current revival, he has produced a short book on who Keynes was and what Keynesianism is. It seems designed to be a primer, but I am surprised to say he succeeds in doing more. Clarke has captured something of the character of the man that many longer and more convoluted biographies fail to convey.

Keynes was a man of life, wide interests, and an exquisite mind. His early focus was more politics than economics, a fact that few of his American admirers

have absorbed. (It may explain why his economic theory was more subtle, engaged, and realistic than anyone else's.) He also had a taste for beautiful things. He drove a Rolls-Royce, at least for a while, and was an avid supporter of ballet, the visual arts, and literature.

It is worth listening to his peers. "When I argued with him, I felt that I took my life in my hands, and I seldom emerged without feeling something of a fool," wrote Bertrand Russell. And here is what Lionel Robbins, a younger economic antagonist, wrote of him:

I often find myself thinking that Keynes must be one of the most remarkable men that have ever lived—the quick logic, the birdlike swoop of intuition, the vivid fancy, the wide vision, above all the incomparable sense of the fitness of words, all combine to make something of several degrees beyond the limit of ordinary achievement....

Clarke knows that to understand the man's influence and the quality of his work, it is important to understand his struggle with his own ideas and his willingness to seek intellectual advice from others. The author has found a novel tool to shed light on the way Keynes thought: verbatim transcripts of policy discussions among a panel of experts (including Keynes) convened by the British government that took place from 1929 to 1931. They allow us to see Keynes as a man of doubt, determination, and dogged pursuit of several large truths.

In such pursuit, he stood one hundred years of conventional economics on its head. Traditional wisdom had it that economies were essentially self-adjusting. In bad times, prices (meaning interest rates, wages, currencies, or the value of commodities) fell until they stimulated more demand. Then, as incomes rose again, all was well with the world.

The most important element in the self-adjusting system was the interest rate. As savings increased or business declined, the interest rate fell, and thereby stimulated more business investment. At some point in the 1920s or early 1930s, Keynes grew skeptical that the interest rate, however low, would assure full and optimal investment of savings. But it took him several years to

come up with an adequate explanation of why this was so. This he did, breathtakingly, in his *General Theory*.

Clarke sells this achievement somewhat short, and draws no distinction between his contribution and that of

Keynes, it is again proven, got the economy more right than anyone.

his later rival, Milton Friedman, during the Reagan years. Friedman cleverly and controversially revived the old theory for contemporary times. Keynes's achievement was a good deal more—and more revolutionary. He made a strong case that economies could settle for long periods of time in a situation of high unemployment, and fundamentally reoriented the game by introducing uncertainty and psychology into macroeconomics. He showed that "animal spirits," not simply a low interest rate, were a foundation of investment and that such "animal spirits" depended on confidence, a strong business environment, and a few things one simply couldn't know at any moment in time. During recession, doubt, fear, and pessimism prevail—and must be counteracted.

This is what is happening today. People are saving far more of their income and thus undercutting demand for goods and services. Profits collapse, businesses fail, jobs vanish, and spending falls all the more. Add to this dangerous spiral a credit crisis of stunning proportions, in which banks and other intermediaries have (or had) no money to make available for investment.

The Federal Reserve acted a bit sluggishly but quite admirably under Ben Bernanke, cutting interest rates sharply and providing funds to the banking system. They may well have stanchied the ensuing economic depression. But it was not enough. Government had to spend to make up for the shortfall in demand and bring back confidence. The Obama administration got a \$787 billion stimu-

lus passed. Sadly, much of it was tax cuts, which will not help encourage spending in this environment. Instead those dollars will flow into savings.

Still, Keynes's central propositions are now in full harness. A falling interest rate will not itself stimulate adequate investment. Economies can bounce along in supposed equilibrium with high unemployment, unused capacity, and feeble investment. Credit must be force-fed, demand must be stimulated, and this requires the government to spend.

Because of Keynes, the nation will probably avert the worst of economic possibilities. If it does, many of Keynes's natural antagonists will soon forget why. They will say that the economy mostly adjusted on its own. They will say new levels of debt were not worth it. They will say that government intervention may well "crowd out" private investment. And they will again be wrong.

Clarke's book is not exhaustive, but he has made a contribution to the sociology of knowledge—to the way great ideas are created—that often eludes many of those who write about and sometimes worship Keynes. However blessed he may have been with talents and the wherewithal to live a lofty and privileged life, Keynes always kept his feet on the ground. He was not a prisoner of pretty, quantifiable economic models but of the hard and dirty facts and a certain abiding common sense about how consumers and savers, businesses and investors, actually made decisions. After steering the British economy through the Depression, he developed sensible policies to finance the war effort, then worked with the U.S. to establish a new postwar currency system. If we had followed Keynes's advice more closely on matters of international currency, we may well have avoided much of what is happening today.

But that is another story. Clarke has written more than a primer about the man who, it is again proven, got the economy more right than anyone else. And whose reputation is likely to live on for another century. **CJR**

JEFF MADRICK is editor of *Challenge Magazine*, a senior fellow of the Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis at The New School, and most recently the author of *The Case for Big Government*.

First Person Singular

An African master recedes behind his own myth

BY EULA BISS

IN A LETTER TO CHINUA ACHEBE, JOHN Updike once admired the swift and surprising ruin of the hero at the conclusion of *Arrow of God*. It was an ending, Updike ventured, that "few Western novelists would have contrived; having created a hero they would not let him crumble, nor are they, by and large, as truthful as you in their witness to the cruel reality of process." The Nigerian novelist had to agree. "Of course," he later wrote, "a Westerner would be most reluctant to destroy 'in a page or two' the angel and paragon of creation—the individual hero. If indeed he has to be destroyed, it must be done expansively with detailed explanations and justifications, not to talk of lamentations."

Those lamentations of the West, our tortured attachment to the individual, might help explain why we harbor such a chatter of anxiety around the notion of autobiography. Ever since the word entered the English language, the very concept has troubled critics of literature. In 1798, one year after the *Oxford English Dictionary's* first citation of "autobiography," the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel declared that such works were written by "neurotics," authors plagued by "self-love," and, most tellingly, "women who also coquette with history."

Coincidentally or not, the term "autobiography" appeared during the ascendancy of the novel. And as the novel gradually became the locus of serious art, the autobiography and the memoir were increasingly accused of artlessness and narcissism. By 1997, *Washington Post* book critic Jonathan Yardley was constructing a mythology of cultural collapse around the publication of Kathryn Harrison's memoir *The Kiss*: "Thus we have a process of regression that marches steadily downhill from *Ulysses* to *Portnoy's Complaint* to *The Kiss*."

The idea that personal narrative is too small, too inward, too individual to reflect our grander collective concerns, is a variation on an attitude that Achebe once observed among critics of fiction. Because the drama in some African novels depended upon the fate of a group, not an individual, these works were dismissed as being too local in their reach. If this seems contradictory, the real problem, of course, was that the group in question was African. In his 1984 lecture, "The Writer and His Community," Achebe remarked:

The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays
By Chinua Achebe
Alfred A. Knopf
192 pages, \$25.95

In the area of literature, I recall that we have sometimes been informed by the West and its local zealots that the African novels we write are not novels at all because they do not quite fit the specifications of that literary form which came into being at a particular time in specific response to the new spirit of individual freedom set off by the decay of feudal Europe and the rise of capitalism. This form, we were told, was designed to explore individual rather than social predicaments.

The African novel and the American memoir have both suffered from critiques fashioned around the word "universal," a term so absurd in its scope and so vague in its meaning that it is all but useless for anything except reminding certain people that they do not matter. "I should like to see the word 'universal' banned altogether from discussions of African literature," Achebe once declared, "until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe, until their horizon extends to include all the world."

Since the advent in this country of what is sometimes called New Memoir, that upwelling of personal narratives in the past few decades, it has become fashionable to disparage the memoir for, among other things, being available to everyone—the young, the unknown, and the marginal. This stance betrays some nostalgia for the memoirs of great men. Yet the innovators of American memoir, those writers who have expanded the artistic bounds of autobiographical writing—Maxine Hong Kingston, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Hilton Als, D.J. Waldie, Abigail Thomas, Alison Bechdel—have not tended, lately, to be great men. Beyond their formal ingenuity, these writers have insisted on the literary potential of individual lives. But they have not made heroes of themselves. Because in a successful memoir the narrator, who we might think of as the hero, is not swiftly ruined as often as she is slowly disassembled. And so the hero, and by proxy the self, is broken open and laid out before us without lament.

THE EDUCATION OF A BRITISH-PROTECTED CHILD is Chinua Achebe's first new book in twenty years. Random House

describes it as a collection of personal essays, but the essays in this collection are only occasionally personal, and they are not of the variety of meditative writing one might shelve next to Montaigne or Sei Shonagon. The book isn't so much a memoir as it is a revisiting of the issues and arguments that have defined Achebe's work. The hero Achebe has become is not disassembled before us in these essays. If anything, he is, as an individual hero, remade.

Achebe begins his title essay, which was originally delivered as a lecture at Cambridge, with the sly suggestion that it is because his application to Cambridge was rejected that he is now a novelist and not a scholar. The essay then meanders through Achebe's education, formal and informal, from the Nwafo Festival in his village to *Treasure Island* in boarding school, with the true subject of the essay, the place where he begins and ends, being the concept of middle ground. "The middle ground," he writes, "is neither the origin of things nor the last things; it is aware of a future to head into and a past to fall back on." At the end of the essay he reminds us:

I could have dwelt on the harsh humiliations of colonial rule or the more dramatic protests against it. But I am also fascinated by that middle ground I spoke about where the human spirit resists an abridgement of its humanity. And this was to be found primarily in the camp of the colonized, but now and again in the ranks of the colonizer too.

Achebe is everywhere in this collection even-handed, and provocatively so. He resists polarities wherever they present themselves, embracing both a "precolonial inheritance" and a "colonial inheritance," appreciating both Christianity and Igbo tradition, and insisting, again, that the literature of Africa can be written in English.

Anyone who has read Achebe's earlier collection of essays, *Hopes and Impediments*, will hear echoes of that work throughout *The Education of a British-Protected Child*. Conrad is flogged again, and repeatedly; John Buchan's unfortunate sentence, "That is the difference between white and black, the gift of responsibility," is revisited several times;

and the sixteenth-century letters from the king of Bukongo to the king of Portugal complaining about the barbaric behavior of Portuguese missionaries in Africa become a kind of refrain.

Achebe won't quite undo himself as he might a fictional hero.

In this new collection Achebe returns to the vast task of recovering Africa's history. He reminds us that in order to proceed with the colonial project, it was essential first for the colonizers to establish that Africans were a people without a history, without culture, without religion, and without education. Part of the tragedy in this, for the colonizers as much as the colonized, was that "these reporters actually came to believe their own stories—such as the complex psychology of the imperial vocation." And that tragedy continues to play out, now, in America, as those false stories have been "bequeathed to the cinema, to journalism, to certain varieties of anthropology, even to humanitarianism and missionary work itself."

If the author treads over some of the same territory he covered twenty years ago, perhaps that is only testimony to how slowly we recover, and how awfully resilient the colonial legacy is. Then again, there is Achebe, the implied hero of the text, traveling on fellowships, attending conferences, receiving awards—all this serves as testimony to what Africa and its writers have salvaged from the wreckage of colonialism.

But Achebe does not seem quite as willing to undo himself in *The Education* as he might a fictional hero, and so his achievements begin to weigh rather heavily on the text. His essay "African Literature as Restoration of Celebration" begins, "Many years ago, I was one of a dozen or so foreign guests at a symposium," and we often find Achebe like this in *The Education*, at a symposium, or attending a gathering held in his

honor, or delivering an address. His essays rarely depend on these moments, or make much of them, with the exception of "Africa is People," in which Achebe attends a meeting of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris. He spends most of the proceedings wondering why he, an African novelist, was invited to a meeting in which Western bankers and economists are spinning fanciful stories out of the fate of Africa's economy, until, in a "stab of insight," he realizes that this is no more than a fiction workshop.

Achebe's many personal anecdotes in *The Education* amount, in the end, to something like liner notes to the great songs of his novels. In this way, *The Education* invites a rather perverse comparison with Hemingway's *A Movable Feast*. Perverse because where Hemingway is cruel, Achebe is humane; where Hemingway's Africa is an empty setting, Achebe's Africa is people; where Hemingway is prone to ugly displays of chauvinism, Achebe is empathic; and where Hemingway liked to fancy himself a great man, Achebe seems truly to be a great man. Nonetheless, fame and nostalgia trouble both *The Education* and *Feast*. Achebe's laurels clutter his text like the empty oyster shells littering Hemingway's bistro tables.

We are, as Americans, both African and European, and so we find ourselves, like Achebe, with a dual legacy. As Achebe puts it:

If the philosophical dictum of Descartes "I think, therefore I am" represents a European individualistic ideal, the Bantu declaration "Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu" represents an African communal aspiration: "A human is human because of other humans."

An artful autobiography can bridge these concepts, opening a mind to us while offering up a self who serves as a map to our collective humanity. In resisting the autobiographical mode, Achebe forfeits his opportunity to inhabit that particular middle ground. **CJR**

EULA BISS is the author of *The Balloonists and Notes from No Man's Land: American Essays*. Her work has appeared in *The Best Creative Nonfiction* and the *Touchstone* Anthology of Contemporary Nonfiction as well as numerous magazines.

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, College of Media, Department of Journalism
810 South Wright Street, 119 Gregory Hall, Urbana, IL 61801

Position: Head, Department of Journalism, College of Media, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Rank: Full professor.

Responsibilities: The head is responsible for administering a department of 15 full-time and several adjunct faculty with an enrollment of 350 undergraduates and 20 master's candidates. The department has undergraduate and graduate programs in both news-editorial and broadcast journalism and is committed to an emphasis on public affairs reporting. The head will manage all aspects of departmental affairs, including budget. The head will maintain and enhance the department's connections with journalism and academic communities at the state and national levels and the department's relationship with alumni. The head will provide innovative leadership and work cooperatively with faculty to define the future direction of the department's programs. The head also will work closely with the dean of the college and other department heads in developing and implementing college policy, including strategic planning and fundraising.

Qualifications: The Department of Journalism in the College of Media at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign seeks candidates with exemplary professional experience and candidates who are receptive to the distinctive nature of academic life. They should have distinguished records of professional and/or academic achievement; professional and/or academic administrative experience is not a requirement, but it will be considered a plus. Candidates should have a solid, well-rounded education, a passion for public affairs journalism, and abilities to lead, to motivate and to listen to their colleagues. They should be able to think strategically and have appreciation and knowledge of journalism in both its traditional and emerging forms. Candidates must have a bachelor's degree; graduate degree preferred.

Salary: Salary is competitive and commensurate with experience.

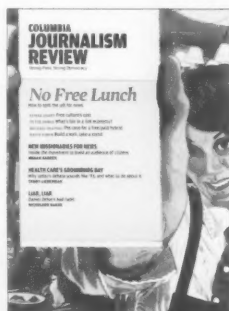
Nature of appointment: Full time.

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Application deadline: October 15, 2009.

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Opening Minds

BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON AND JULIA SONNEVEND



VIEWERS OF *THE COLBERT REPORT* DO not all see the same show. Liberals see host Stephen Colbert as a liberal acting the part of intolerant blowhard. Conservatives, in contrast, identify with many of the attitudes Colbert affects and relish the ridicule he heaps on liberal nostrums and liberal guests. Both groups think *The Colbert Report* is funny. Both groups think Colbert is on their side.

So conclude Heather LaMarre, Kristen Landreville, and Michael Beam of Ohio State University, who showed video clips of *Colbert* to three hundred college students for their study "The Irony of Satire," published in the April 2009 *International Journal of Press/Politics*. As the authors note, the findings mirror those of a study done thirty-five years ago of viewer responses to *All in the Family*, the most popular TV sitcom of the 1970s. In that study, Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach found that liberals considered Archie Bunker, the politically conservative protagonist, the racist and sexist goat of the show, his bluster blatantly ridiculous, whereas conservatives saw Archie as the hero of the show, giving voice to a shared morality.

We take issue with the authors' statement that the power of political satire to influence opinion is more modest than one might imagine because "audience perceptions play a much stronger role than previously thought." Previously thought by whom? The notion of "selective perception"—people seeing what they want to see—has been a hallowed touchstone in the literature of social psychology for decades.

Still, the Ohio State study does shine a light on an interesting dilemma facing media professionals: If selective perception is so powerful, how do they persuade audiences to open their minds to change, embrace a fresh outlook? Well, it isn't easy, especially when dealing with issues that elicit strong feelings in audiences. One tactic, often employed in both advertising and politics, is to recruit a celebrity spokesperson. According to the standard view of celebrity advocacy, celebrities quickly draw attention to particular issues and coax the public to sign on. If you have a neglected cause with great news potential, just get a Bono or an Angelina Jolie to trumpet your message and it will quickly become part of the mainstream news flow.

Or maybe not. A study by A. Trevor Thrall and seven graduate students from the

University of Michigan—Dearborn finds that although celebrities participate in advocacy more than ever before, their influence on getting their issues covered in the news remains minimal. According to the study "Star Power: Celebrity Advocacy and the Evolution of the Public Sphere," published in the October 2008 *International Journal of Press/Politics*, the more famous a celebrity, the more active he or she will be in advocacy; and while high-profile celebrities are more likely to get their issues in the news than less famous celebrities, the overall effectiveness of celebrity advocacy is still marginal. According to the authors, celebrity advocacy has moved increasingly from trying to convince media gatekeepers to place their causes on news programs for general audiences to targeting already-interested parties online, especially on social networking sites, to urge them to commit more time and money to their favorite causes. In short, even celebrity advocacy is discovering the efficiency of narrowcasting.

The authors focused their study on print-media sources but they might have found more star-power impact on general audiences by looking at local radio, local TV, or even Twitter, where Ashton Kutcher recently advocated for malaria prevention. The authors also warn that our fragmented media space leads to increasingly partisan attitudes, supporting the common complaint that in the new media environment, people listen only to those they agree with. But that conclusion strikes us as premature—the new media environment also creates meeting points of diverse opinions; blog posts often link to and comment on sources they strongly disagree with, exposing readers to broader contexts, and Google searches yield ideologically diverse sites whether you want them or not. The more rapidly and remarkably things change in our media environment, the more carefully we have to examine whether, or how, or in what direction, or in which various directions, those often stubborn creatures—human beings—are changing, too, if at all. **CJR**

MICHAEL SCHUDSON teaches at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.
JULIA SONNEVEND is a Ph.D. student in communications at Columbia.

The Lower Case

Tests show man not missing boy

Iowa City Press-Citizen 6/19/09

Federal judge likes sentencing freedom

(Pierre, SD) Capital Journal 6/29/09

Woodside weighs demolition permit for Jackling house and Steve Jobs

(Menlo Park, CA) The Almanac 6/24/09

Homeless man held in blaze at complex

Indianapolis Star 3/2/09

State to recycle vilified waste management board

(Orville, CA) Enterprise-Record/Mercury Register 7/24/09

How Scientists Are Helping Cook Inlet's Little White Whales

Alaska Magazine February 2002

North Star plans for fall

(Marquette, MI) The Mining Journal 7/10/09

TV pilots shot in R.I. await word of fate

The Providence Journal 4/25/09

Gregoire Orders Climate Change

(Bremerton, WA) Kitsap Sun 5/22/09

Missing wall allows escape from new jail

(Baton Rouge, LA) The Advocate 6/24/09

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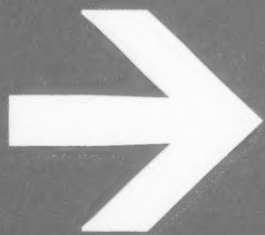
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The screenshot shows the Columbia Journalism Review website in a browser window. The browser's address bar displays 'http://cjr.org/'. The website header includes the title 'COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW' and the tagline 'Strong Press, Strong Democracy'. Navigation links for 'Desks', 'Blog', 'Columns', 'Talk', 'Magazine', 'Multimedia', 'Projects', and 'Resources' are visible. A large portrait of a man is featured in the center. To the right, a 'DESKS' section lists various topics like 'Campaign Desk Politics & Who Will Be at the Table?' and 'The Audit Business'. At the bottom, there are sections for 'The Observatory' and 'The Audit', each with a video link and author information.

Parking lot floods when man bursts

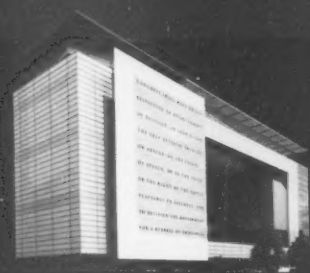
The Herald-Sun, Durham, N.C. 02/04/94

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